Becoming Family

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Becoming Family

by LivingOnTheEdge5

Summary

While visiting his vacation home in Northern California, Hannibal discovers an abandoned baby who becomes his foster child.

Notes

Dedicated to Elle82 and telera- thank you so much for all your support- you two are the best!!!

See the end of the work for more notes

The River House

"I had now found my first friend, and so my life was truly begun."

The Exploits of Moominpappa

Hannibal Lecter locks the door to his private psychotherapy office and walks the short distance to his home.

Ever since completing his residency in '91 he's practiced here, in the China Beach neighborhood of San Francisco where up until five months ago he'd lived with his fiancé.

He enters his house and methodically gathers last-minute items before loading them, his suitcases, and boxes of cleaning supplies into what he still considers his 'family car.'

"Our 'baby car," Roger had told him, pressing the keys into Hannibal's hand and a kiss to his lips; a symbol of new beginnings. *How did I ever fall for such a cheesy line?*

Hannibal pushes the ignition button and the engine purrs to life. *I really should off-load this; preferably well under Blue Book. But I have to admit...the kalakutpisa knew how to pick a car... too bad he just couldn't keep his dick in his pants.*

Hannibal backs out of his garage and into the street; and just like that, the cares of the week drop- away like a discarded sweater.

He's off; driving North the two hours to his vacation home, a one hundred and twenty year old house constructed of hand-hewn, old-growth redwood, painted a rich, chocolate- brown and nestled, snug as a nesting quail, in a bend of the Russian River.

Paul, its co-owner had called a couple days ago, offering him the use of the house for the long weekend.

"We can't go because of this flu. Can you? Someone needs to go and check it out; make sure nothing was damaged in the storm or "seasonal guests," Paul's favored euphemism for squatters.

The little towns closest to Hannibal's River House, had been recently slammed with massive storms, a fairly common occurrence, and the subsequent flooding had wreaked havoc on the tiny communities.

Built well above the flood plain, the house had, long before Hannibal and Paul owned it, a reputation of being an informal flophouse for locals needing a temporary place to stay until the waters receded. Paul had never felt comfortable with the arrangement, but Hannibal didn't see the harm, especially since flood victims were typically grateful as well as respectful of the venerable old place.

But an empty vacation home tends to attract its fair share of drive-by looters too, and both men agreed that those had proven troublesome.

After their first burglary, six years ago, the friends had finally followed the previous owner's advice; keep a downstairs window unlocked. If someone wants in, they'll get in, so why not avoid costly repairs?

Hopefully, if anyone's been there, they were well mannered and are long gone, Hannibal thinks as he waits to cross the Golden Gate, because I'm not thrilled about that alarm system Paul's threatening to install. Besides, there's nothing left of value since they prised-off the ivory piano keys; except maybe the chandeliers, and those weigh... what...four...maybe five hundred pounds each?

As he idles in traffic, Hannibal cues-up one of his favorite Miles Davis albums, "Live at the 1963 Monterey Jazz Festival" recorded the year he'd turned one.
He taps the steering wheel as William's lays down a beat, and the traffic begins to inch along: bridge giving way to open freeway, freeway to highway, highway to country roads.

Its late afternoon by the time Hannibal reaches the first little village. And though the air is chill and damp, he rolls his window anyway, relishing the scents of rain-freshened redwoods and churned-up river mud.

"Where the 'sleaze meets the trees' the old-timers who remembered this place back in the fifties had joked. Created by turn of the century San Franciscans as a tourist destination, the area had fallen on hard times mid-century, until the 60's, when members of the LGTB community began a Renaissance of sorts; taking over many of the closed and failing business and breathing new life into the tiny resort towns.

Hannibal had been a child living in Lithuania at that time; a country still under the yoke of Soviet control. But Glasnost was looming on the horizon, and by the time Hannibal had graduated from university, the former Young Pioneer had decided he wanted to attend medical school in America. He applied for, and was accepted in a cultural exchange program, had kissed his family goodbye, left for UCSF and his new life and had never looked back.

He passes the Dawn Ranch Lodge and grins. This place held fond memories for him back when it was 'Fife's, a wildly popular 'gay resort' in the 80's and 90's. He and other interns and residents would drive up from The City to pass "lost weekends" and summer holidays in the rustic cabins.

Young, curious, and a stranger in a strange land, Hannibal had felt safe and nurtured there as he explored his sexuality. Exciting, halcyon days, full of good friends and laughter, even as

the storm clouds of the AIDs epidemic had begun to gather and blow cold.

A feeling of ice water trickles down Hannibal's back as he thinks of That Time; when, friends, colleagues and even a former boyfriend had been struck down by a terrifying and little understood plague.

Young vigorous men, transformed, sometimes in the matter of months, into gaunt, hollowed-eyed, depleted shells of themselves.

The old, familiar nausea sweeps over Hannibal and he's tumbled headfirst into unwanted recollections: empty bars, boarded-up bath houses, false hopes, rumors and whispers of rumors, stomach churning fear waiting for test results, more tests, a government seemingly complicit in a community's suffering, Gaëtan Dugas, Ryan White, And The Band Played On...thousands upon thousands of quilt squares.

Hannibal shakes his head. *Don't go back there,* he cautions himself, *Think about now...think about this weekend...think about food.*

He drives until he spots a grocery store and stops for supplies and is pleased to see shops are already drying-out and business has returned to normal. Hannibal stows his purchases and climbs back in the car for the final leg of his journey; a quick drive through second growth forest, a bend in the road and then... he's there.

Three whole days of no calls, patients, or emails.

Heaven.

Ten minutes later finds him pulling up to the narrow parking strip outside his river house.

Surrounded by towering redwoods, and built on a gentle slope, the house's two thousand square feet can only be experienced by walking through its floor plan. Hannibal unlocks the front door and steps directly into the purely functional kitchen, practically identical how it appeared the first time he saw it six years ago.

"Welcome gentlemen! Here is the kitchen, complete with all the modern conveniences."

Hannibal had almost laughed aloud at the ancient man's claim, though he had to admit, the kitchen would certainly qualify as 'modern' in many parts of the world.

"My Uncle Rollin ran this place as a cat house and speak easy all during the twenties and thirties; told us kids he'd won it in a card game."

After the lackluster kitchen, pushing through the swinging door and into the dining and living rooms had been a glorious revelation; Alice entering Wonderland.

Large, beautifully proportioned rooms, high, timbered ceilings, masterful carpentry and plasterwork, multi-paned casement windows which brought the outside in, manor-sized mahogany dining table, enormous Waterford crystal chandeliers.

"Holy shit!" Had been Paul's elegant response.

"Nice, huh?"

Then, with twinkle in his eye their host had asked whether they would be interested in a little wager.

"A bet?"

"Of sorts. I'm thinking, smart, young doctors such as yourselves should have no problem figuring out this home's little secret."

Feeling like characters in a novel, the friends had agreed; stalking through the house like a couple of tweed-suited detectives. They'd knocked on walls, pushed fireplace stones, tested cupboard backs, peered behind paintings and into closets. They'd scoured the whole house, but eventually had admitted defeat.

"Hee, hee, hee! Well...guess the old place's secret's still safe! Though not from lack of trying! "

"So... what is it?"

"Ah... well... that's for me... the ghosts...and the next owners to know."

"Ghosts?"

Hannibal couldn't help the thrill he'd felt from that single word, even as Paul had given him some side-eye.

"We'll take it," Hannibal had blurted impulsively; ghosts, a mysterious ' secret', Waterford chandeliers, the baby grand, a massive claw-footed bathtub, utter peace and beauty in a community he'd cherished for years?! Hannibal was smitten.

Luckily for the future of their friendship, Paul and his wife had agreed to sign-on as co-owners.

The old house was theirs.

The day after escrow closed, the seller had shown revealed "the secret."

He demonstrated how to activate an internal spring, causing a section of wall to pop open and reveal a small room.

"There you go gentleman, your very own Prohibition-era bolt hole! I call it 'The Secret Room."

It all worked-out in the end. And the secret room has proven to be invaluable.

Hannibal closes the front door and places the groceries on the counter.

His cheerful mood ends abruptly when he sees that cupboards hang open, and dirty dishes fill the sink.

Hannibal knows neither Paul nor his guests would ever leave the kitchen in such a condition.

So...we have had a visitation. Hannibal grimaces at the dried mud on the linoleum. I wonder if they're still here? No car but they could be docked on the river. He stands still, listening intently for sounds of occupation.

Complete and profound silence.

Hannibal puts his perishable groceries away and closes the massive, old Frigidaire. He turns left and follows the muddy trail through the front bedroom and into the bathroom. Hannibal takes a quick leak and washes his hands at the Edwardian sink; separate taps for hot and cold water both of which run cold, the ancient beast of an oil heater presumably beyond the keen of modern-day squatters.

Hannibal's mood dips further when he goes to dry his hands; no towels. He turns, and feels the first flicker of actual anger when he sees the filthy condition of the bathtub.

River silt...no hot water...not ideal conditions for bathing... but they could have at least rinsed it, he grumps, wiping his hands on his slacks and continuing through to the back bedroom.

Bingo.

The twin beds are rumpled. Two of his missing towels, stiff as boards, hang at the foot of their iron frames. Hannibal half-heartedly sifts through the bedding but finds nothing to identify whom, or even how many people have been bunking here. He walks past the beds and, on a whim, into the storage room.

He opens the door to step inside the long, narrow space, built, for some long-lost logic, behind the living room's massive stone chimney which makes-up one of its walls. The second and third walls are windows giving the room a bright, greenhouse effect.

Hannibal feels the chimney's stonework; a whisper of warmth.

As he's leaving, he trods on something.

It's a Little People figure.

He casts his eyes down and around; the bare wooden floor is littered with figurines;somebody has been putting Paul's vintage Fisher Price toys to good use. They stand lined-up and in little groups, the way a child would arrange them at play. Hannibal frowns consideringly. Nowhere had he seen signs a child had been staying here; his mind flits nonsensically to ghosts.

"Ridiculous."

He leaves everything as he found it and walks back thorough the bedroom and out the door which opens directly into the living room.

As always, he takes a moment to admire the space: smooth, painted redwood floors sprinkled here and there with threadbare Oriental rugs, vaulted ceilings, quaint Victorian rattan armchairs and couches, a baby grand piano with its now plundered ivory keyboard, the wall of windows beyond.

Hannibal walks over to gaze at the view the original paterfamilias had chosen for his family's vacation home: a wide, green U of a river thickly lined with redwoods, California buckeyes, bays, oaks, and madrones. A view, for all intents and purposes unchanged since the first family travelled here by train one hundred and twenty years ago.

Other than the rippling water, there is no other movement or signs of life. Even the other homes, strung-out along the banks like pearls on a necklace, are obscured or completely hidden by trees. Then Hannibal remembers he has a mission.

He returns to the fireplace, grabs a poker and stirs its contents; no glowing coals or retained heat. Clutching the fire iron in his hand he calls out.

"Hello! If you're still here, I'd like to meet you!"

His voice thunders across the quiet space.

Hannibal waits a beat before striding through the living room, formal dining room, and out the glass doors to the enclosed side porch. He turns and descends the steep staircase to the lower level, pausing once to listen for running feet or slamming doors; nothing.

He reaches the bottom and steps into the 'Pool Room.'

So...this is where they spent their time.

The antique pool table's felt top is piled with clothing, garbage bags, muddy towels, and dirty dishes.

Hannibal casts his eyes around and shakes his head in disbelief; there's a full day's work here.

He walks between the pool and ping pong tables and pulls open the closet; nothing but stacks of old boating supplies and items for the beach. He checks the little recessed wet bar, bathroom, and finally the back bedroom and its closet under the stairs.

Nothing but more dirty dishes and garbage.

Well whoever was here is gone. Strange they didn't clean up or take their stuff; maybe they were scared-off?

Hannibal pulls open the deck's sliding glass and steps out into an indigo dusk and the good scents of river and forest. He breathes in bracing lungfuls and feels his spirit's lift. *Okay...I can do this! Brrrrr! Time to go light the heater and start a fire. At least they didn't use up all the logs...maybe I'll barbeque that salmon in the fireplace.* Hannibal goes back inside to begin his chores. He has just closed and locked the glass door when a sudden movement catches his eye. Startled, he spins, and drops the poker which crashes to the ground. What he'd assumed was an empty, discarded sleeping bag... is wiggling.

Hannibal stares in astonishment as a tiny, oval- shaped face appears and gapes up at him.

There Is No One Left

Chapter Summary

Hannibal discovers a baby has been left behind by the unknown vistors.

Chapter Notes

I've been having a bit of insomnia, so I've been doing more writing than expected.

This chapter is dedicated to Elle82, mondkalb, Azvee, libran53- all readers who have been kind and generous supporters of this and previous works

Thank you! (ノ◕ヮ◕)ノ*:･ﾟ✧ *:･ﾟ✧

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"Haven't you got a mother?" asked Moomintroll, looking very sorry for him.
"I don't know," said Snufkin. "They tell me I was found in a basket."
"Like Moses," said Sniff.
"I like the story about Moses," said the Snork. "But I think his mother could have found a better way of saving him, don't you? The crocodiles might have eaten him up."

Comet in Moominland

"Ahhhh," the man yelps, recoiling, and trips over the poker.

It's a child; a baby really, sex unknown, with delicately molded features, and large, frightened blue eyes framed all around by honey-brown curls. The child squeaks and disappears back inside the bag.

"Sorry! I didn't mean to scare you!"

Hannibal's words fall on deaf ears; the baby has burrowed to the bottom of the sleeping bag where it commences to wail.

"Shit!"

Hannibal glances idiotically around, as though the child's parents might magically appear.

No such luck.

From what he saw, the little one looks to be no older than a year; certainly not old enough to be left here on its own.

The man approaches the little wriggling lump, encased in a flannel-lined bag he now recognizes as one he'd left behind after his last visit.

"Hey there," he croons in what he hopes is a soothing tone," it's alright." He kneels by the bag and its Thanksgiving turkey-sized bump. "Don't be scared...I just want to help."

Concerned the child is not getting enough air, he unzips the sides of the bag; the bump screams like a rabbit. Resigned, Hannibal sits down beside the trembling bag to wait.

Slow minutes pass before the sobs finally die down, only to be replaced with pathetic calls for "Mama! Mama!"

A lump forms in Hannibal's throat. He very slowly folds down the sides of the bag.

As soon as cold air hits its head, the child begins to scream again; its fear is so visceral, the hairs on the back of Hannibal's neck stand-up. He grits his teeth and forces himself to grab ahold of the baby who is clad in nothing but a thin t-shirt and disposable diaper.

The child shrieks and flails in his grip; tiny fits connecting with his arms and chest. The man struggles to keep a firm grip on the little body without squeezing too tightly. "Shh, shh. It's alright, it's alright," he murmurs, attempting to settle the child in his arms. "Let's go find your mommy."

His words appear to calm the mite; at least enough for it to stop thrashing, which is a good thing, because it's sagging diaper is horribly full.

"Diapers... diapers...where are the diapers?" Hannibal asks rhetorically and is ecstatic when he finds a clean one amongst the detritus. "Excellent!" He says, carrying the child upstairs to where it's warmer.

"'ama, 'ama, 'ama," the little one babbles around its thumb, small body trembling with fear.

Hannibal goes into the kitchen where he tears open a bag of mint Milano's and offers one to his reluctant house guest. *Six maybe seven months*? He wonders, as he wraps a cashmere sweater around its back and shoulders.

The child looks questioningly up at him. Then a chubby fist closes around the cookie and pulls it away. Hannibal wonders too late if he needs to worry about food allergies

"Hey! Be careful! You'll choke!"

In its zeal, the child has stuffed a whole Milano into its mouth. Hannibal's concern has sharpened his tone and the little body stiffens in response. The man watches with growing alarm as the cookie drops to the floor. A piercing shriek slams into his eardrums from point blank range.

"Shit! Sorry! Sorry!"

Hannibal fumbles at the bag, grabbing two more cookies and thrusting them at the child. "Here! Take them!"

Still screaming, the baby manages to take possession of the cookies and holds them at arm's length for safe-keeping.

"That's okay, they're yours!" Hannibal says miserably, walking in circles and jiggling the child in an attempt to calm it.

Finally, the crying slows, quiets, and is replaced by a grousing whine.

The child fixes Hannibal with a sour, suspicious, glare before slowly, and cautiously, bringing a cookie to its mouth; the sweet smell of vanilla and mint fill the air like a benediction.

Hannibal has never felt such cookie-based relief in his whole life.

"See? I'm not taking them...just take little bites, okay?" He says weakly, heart still racing from adrenaline.

They continue to walk and jiggle until the boy has demolished one cookie and Hannibal's arm, slacks, and sweater are wet from diaper leakage; time to fix that.

He goes to the bathroom to retrieve supplies."Damn, that's right, no towels...though I probably shouldn't swear," he adds thoughtfully when the little face turns to gaze up at him.

The child pauses in mid-chew, and blinks once, like a ruffled owlet. "We need to go find some towels," Hannibal continues, wondering why he feels compelled to give a running commentary of his actions.

He finally finds what he is looking for a downstairs closet.

"Ah, ha! Clean towels!"

He goes back upstairs and spreads one out across a bed.

As soon as it feels itself being lowered, the child begins squirming and crying. "Wait! Just for a second kiddo! I need to change your diaper!"

Hannibal gingerly presses one hand on the tiny, heaving chest while pulling at the diaper's plastic tabs with the other. The baby freezes at the contact, staring up at him with shimmering, tear filled-eyes. Desperately, Hannibal gives tape a mighty yank.

RIPPPPPP

SPLAT

The tab rips away, taking with it, whatever structural integrity still remained in the diaper. Urine-soaked blue gel explodes across the child's belly and chest.

"Crap!" Hannibal yells, quickly swiping the largest chunks off the...boy's... gender now being confirmed, body. "Well young man! Mr. Diaper has seen better days!"

The boy winces and arches as his inflamed, tender skin comes in contact with the wet cloth."Poor little guy," Hannibal mutters under his breath as he attempts to clean caked feces off the little bottom. He manages to get the worst of it, but decides a bath is the only way to finish the job; he'll conserve the precious diaper for later. But heating water by the oil heater could take hours.

"Stove top water it is," he tells the boy as he wraps his nether regions in a clean towel and pulls him into his arms. " See? Isn't that better?" He remarks conversationally as he carries the boy to the kitchen to fill a kettle.

"Maaama," the boy whines around a mouthful of crumbs and Hannibal winces; the enormity of their situation sinking in.

"Hold on buddy... I just need to heat some water to give you a bath. She'll be here... in a little bit. I like how carefully you're taking those bites! Just keep doing that until your mama comes. Alright?"

In spite of his own babbling, Hannibal's heart squeezes when the child stares up at him and grips his sweater with baby fists sticky with melted chocolate.

"Milk!" He suddenly exclaims, ashamed he hasn't thought of this before.

"Yah," the boy replies seriously. "Mak!"

Hannibal smiles, feeling a sense of accomplishment; they're communicating! Great!

He pulls a carton of milk from the frig and, without thinking, fills a glass to the brim. Before Hannibal can even register what's happening, the boy is lunging forward, jettisoning the glass off the counter and nearly toppling out of his arms in the process.

"No!" Hannibal yells, clutching at the falling child.

"Uh oh! " the boy cries, flinching and curling-up like a threatened pill bug; the reaction of a child anticipating punishment.

"It's okay, it's just a little spill. I'll clean it later. Let's get you a new cup."

This time, Hannibal selects a plastic tumbler and fills it only halfway. "Let me hold it," he orders holding the cup out of the baby's reach.

"Mak, mak, mak!" The boy scowls, arms upraised, dimpled hands wiggling in an attempt to capture his prize.

"Yes, 'mak' but slowly, and together, " Hannibal says, as he brings the cup closer. As soon as it comes within range, strong baby hands capture the cup, sloshing milk over them both as the boy eagerly sticks his face in it. "Whoa there kiddo!"

What he lacks in experience, he certainly makes up for in enthusiasm!

"Mow! Mow!"

"More?"

"Yah," the boy nods, then notices his cookie-less hands. He turns such a surprised, tragic face to Hannibal that a chuckle bursts from his diaphragm. He good naturedly digs into the bag for two more; "Taika bet kokia kaina," as his mother would sometimes say.

"Here you go."

"Yah," the boy nods. " Mow! Mak!"

Hannibal pours another couple inches of milk.

"Alright, here you are my little cookie monster. God help us if you're allergic to any of this, " he comments and begins pulling fruit, vegetables, and cheese out of the frig.

"You're a good eater," Hannibal concedes after the baby has worked his way through his edibles. He is just wiping the boy's mouth when the kettle begins to whistle. The child stiffens and whimpers, so Hannibal pats its tiny back while explaining what the sound means until it relaxes again.

The boy turns intelligent blue eyes up to Hannibal.

"Haw?"

"Yes! Hot! We need it to help make your bath warm."

Hannibal unpacks his toiletry kit, then places the baby on the bathroom tiles so he can race back to the kitchen for the kettle.

Though he returns in seconds, he's nonetheless surprised that the child hasn't changed positions, seemingly content to suck his thumb and wait to see what happens next.

"Mama?" The boy asks, blinking sleepily as Hannibal scrubs and rinses the tub before filling it with three inches of cold water.

"She's coming."

As he mixes in the water and tests it, Hannibal wonders if the boy crawls. He can't believe a child this age has been left alone for so long; unless he was deliberately abandoned. The psychiatrics' mind balks at the idea: a defenseless baby, alone, hungry, and frightened, waiting for a mother who never returns.

"Bas!" The boy says, pointing at the bathtub.

"Yes, bath! Very good! Okay berniukas, time to get clean!"

"keen," the boy parrots. Hannibal chuckles and removes the boy's thin t-shirt, draped sweater, and towel. The child immediately begins to shiver in the chilly air so he's quickly plopped into the tub.

"I'm going to make it quick, but this might sting a little," Hannibal warns, as he lathers-up his hands with bath gel.

The next ten minutes are hellish, for both of them. The boy's advanced diaper rash and Hannibal's inexperience with bathing or shampooing a wriggling infant not lending itself to a calm or pleasant experience.

"Sorrysorrysorry," the man says over and over as the baby squirms and cries.

Finally the hard parts are over and after rinsing and refilling the tub, the boy is allowed to sit and enjoy a calming soak.

"Bas," the boy lisps, chubby cheeks still wet with tears. He slaps his hands on the surface of the warm water.

"Yes, bath."

Hannibal slumps onto the toilet lid; utterly drained and exhausted. He checks his watch; twenty-five minutes have passed since he'd first discovered the child yet it feels like hours.

This is so much harder than I thought it would be...I wonder what sort of daddy Paul would have made; our baby would be just around this little one's age.

Keeping an eye on the child, Hannibal pulls his phone from his pocket to call the police.

"Bas, bas, bas," the boy chants, hitting the water and kicking his chubby legs like a little frog.

Then he quiets, lifts eyes as clear and blue as an October sky, looks straight into Hannibal's brown ones...and smiles.

Chapter End Notes

chapter title from "The Secret Garden"

Taika bet kokia kaina-Lithuaniun for Peace at Any Price = provided by AO3 user Anne(thank you soooo much !)
berniukas-little boy.

The First Time Ever I Saw Your Face

Chapter Summary

Hannibal has a revelation

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The first time
ever I saw your face
I thought the sun rose in your eyes
And the moon and the stars
were the gifts you gave
to the dark
and the endless skies
my love
-Roberta Flack

How does one describe such a moment?

Hannibal sits in the chill of the unheated bathroom, and stares, utterly spellbound, into the little face and those dancing eyes: large, grey-blue, brimming with intelligence and imbued with a sweetness of spirit.

How does one qualify or explain how it feels? To be graced by a baby's shy, small, trusting, smile?

Hannibal feels like he's grabbed a live wire, but one which courses through his psyche; it halts his breath, stills time, and sets off a seismic shift in his heart.

"It was like... he looked at me..." he tried explaining to his mother later that night, " and found the papa he didn't know he had. And I just... knew. I knew he belongs to me. Is that as crazy as it sounds?"

His mother's joyful laugh had made tears well in his eyes.

"Ne, bandelė. You found him. He found you. It was meant to be. Aš tave myliu. "

"Aš tave myliu,mamutė."

Hannibal and the boy sit in the silent bathroom until Hannibal speaks and breaks the spell.

"I'm...I'm just going to make a few, quick calls...okay?" He stutters still emotional from his revelation.

"Yah." The baby grins and recommences to splash.

Hannibal opens his contacts and places his call.

" Walt? It's Hannibal I need your help." Hannibal brings his best friend and attorney up to speed.

"Please tell me you're kidding! ? Because, even for you, this is a bad joke."

"I'm not kidding Walt! He's here... with me right now!"

"Wait...is that him babbling!? You really did just find a kid!?"

"Yes! They just left him! Don't you think CPS would rule that as neglect? Abuse even? But there's more...the real reason I'm calling...is because I want to become his father."

"Hannibal...I am really not in the mood..."

"I'm serious."

"You're serious... " Walt's sigh sounds like a groan. "Okay, so...what are you saying? You want to foster him?"

"Yes, first foster and then adopt. You should have seen how I found him! No food, no bottle, not even water! And his diaper hadn't been changed in ages!"

"Pump your breaks Speed Racer. CPS won't just break-up a family that easily. Besides, you don't know anything about this kid or his situation. His parents could turn up at any moment. Are you prepared for that...for them!?"

From Walt's end Hannibal can hear children shrieking. "Sorry... we're at a birthday party."

"We were *this* close to adopting, Walt and then *this* close to ..."Hannibal stops, overcome.

"Yeah, I know...I'm sorry...that's how surrogacy goes sometimes..."

"It's fine... I'm not blaming you. It's just that *five* years out of our lives...all those false alarms...I can't explain it but this boy? He's meant to be with me. Can't you just jumpstart my paperwork?"

Hannibal looks down at the baby burbling happily as he plays a private game. His small hands are spread like sea stars across his cubby legs; his round checks and belly are pink from the warm water.

"It's not a question of paperwork, man! This could take weeks, months! And babies are always highly sought after. You need to call the cops."

"I will as soon as I get off the phone with you. Will you take me...us...on?"

It seems an age passes for Walt to make his decision.

"Okay...okay. I'll call 'round...see what I can do. There goes my weekend!"

Hannibal's relief comes out as a puff of air. It attracts the little boy's attention who begins to thoughtfully blow his own raspberries in time to his splashing.

"Ha! That him again?"

"Yes, he's quite the performer. Thank you Walt...trust me, this is going to work. And just to confirm...this is pro bono- right?"

Walt laughs. "Hell no asshole! But I'm sure Fisher will throw you one fucking amazing, 'Welcome to the Family' party when the time comes."

Hannibal's throat tightens at the image."Thanks, Walter," he croaks.

"Well...don't get your hopes up...but I'll do my best. Now go and call the cops... And Hannibal?"

"Yes?"

"Good luck...to all of us but especially to that little guy. We're all going to fucking need it."

Chapter End Notes

Ne, bandelė. Aš tave myliu. "- no, little breadroll/bun. I love you. (this is the only diminutive I could find- waaa! So I decided that was his mother's nickname for him)

"Aš tave myliu,mamutė."- I love you mommy. (would a grown man say 'mommy'? probably not- but he was emotional at the time ;0)

Jonathan

Chapter Summary

Hannibal receives an unexpected call.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Four Weeks Later

"Dr. Lecter?"

"Speaking."

"Good morning! This is Mrs. Inez from CDSS are you free to speak?"

"I am, how are you?"

"I'm well, thank you. Before we begin, could you please confirm your case and social security numbers?"

Hannibal's grip on his phone tightens but he knows better than to get his hopes up. He recites both numbers.

"Excellent and any changes to your employment or address?"

Hannibal replies to the negative.

"Well, Dr. Lecter, I'm pleased to inform you that the infant John Doe, is ready to be placed into your provisional care. Is that still acceptable?"

"Yes," Hannibal croaks then holds his breath.

"Wonderful! And he has a name now; do you have a pencil or pen handy? It's Jonathan... J O N A T H A N. But he doesn't recognize it yet, so please help reinforce it by using it as often as possible."

Hannibal feels as though he's been sucker punched; "being called out of one's name" is a marginalized person's worst nightmare.

"I understand. And does this start the clock for his eventual adoption?"

"Not necessarily. All I can tell you is that there is an ongoing, criminal investigation. I will bring Jonathan by between three and five o'clock."

"Thank you."

"Thank you, Doctor Lecter. See you this afternoon."

"Yes, see you then."

"Goodbye."

"Goodbye."

Hannibal's legs buckle and he slumps onto his desk sending folders flying.

"Damn."

The truth is, Hannibal hadn't thought the process would move so quickly; the crib, bought years ago, sits partially disassembled under tarps in his garage, the same for his hoard of more recent purchases.

As they'd walked the aisles at Babies R Us together, Fisher the resident baby guru, had advised him against the changing table he'd just selected.

"It's superfluous! Honestly, who changes diapers on a changing table?"

Hannibal hadn't an answer to that, assuming it was purely rhetorical, and had grabbed tags for the changing table, a high chair, and a jogging stroller.

Fisher gaped with disbelief at Hannibal's near pathological drive to fill a cart: toddler car seat, diaper genie, wipes, onesies, socks, cloth diapers, and enough disposable ones to create a diaper-based landfill.

"How old is the baby?" Fisher asked, eyeing the bottles, brushes, and canisters of formula as Hannibal began to fill a second cart. "I doubt you'll need all this... or all those receiving blankets...don't buy all this! There'll be nothing left to give you at your shower!"

" Всегда готов!" Hannibal barks without looking up from the baby jar labels he's reading.

"What the hell does that mean?! Don't buy those! I'll show you how to make your own!"

"Always prepared!" Hannibal translates, ignoring them and placing a variety pack of baby food jars into his cart. " The Young Pioneer slogan!" He adds before tossing boxes of three different sorts of cereal onto the growing pile. "But to answer your previous question, the baby is roughly seven months, but he's less than tenth percentile for height and third for weight."

"That's tiny! Are you sure he's Caucasian?" Fisher teases smugly; their own sons, half Chinese- American, half African-American, are already predicted to reach six feet by puberty.

"Ha, ha...very funny. Well whatever he is, I'm raising him as one hundred percent Lithuanian," Hannibal jokes.

"Now that is a marketable language to know! Maybe Lithuanian will be the new trendy language in baby flashcards!"

"With an attitude like that," Hannibal says, gazing hopelessly at the bewildering array of slings and backpacks, "don't expect any help with college tuition from this flashcard entrepreneur!"

"Deal. Just promise that you won't go all Rosie Pope on us."

"Rosie who?"

"Nevermind, sér, let's just go checkout."

"You know, sér is Russian, not Lithuanian."

"Yes, I know, diaspora, baby."

"Smart-ass."

Hannibal ponders this latest information.

Jonathan? So that's what happens? Just choose a random name like you'd label a stray in an overcrowded kennel?

Hannibal considers the disturbing facts: his will be the child's third foster home in as many weeks, medical examinations had unearthed healing fractures and rampant malnutrition, and now, this new name assignment.

Hannibal pushes away from his desk aware he is falling down the rabbit hole of catastrophic thinking. He pulls-up his "Baby To Do List" and goes through the items; cancelling all his appointments for the next three weeks, activating his referral network, and spending the next fifteen minutes texting SOS's to every friend within a fifty mile radius.

David arrives, half an hour later, bearing homemade bread, three bags of hand-me down clothes and the twins.

"I've always wanted to be part of a good old fashioned crib-raising," he jokes.

"Let me guess... still watching 'Breaking Amish'?"

"Streaming Season 5. So, what do you need?"

The twins immediately make themselves at home; running through the rooms, getting underfoot, and ripping-off pieces of packaging to "make snow", until they're finally corralled into the living room for a DVD. To Hannibal the transformation from whirling dervishes to toddler-sized couch potatoes is nothing short of miraculous, and a little scary.

"Gotta know when to use 'America's Babysitter," David breezily confides. "Otherwise you're going to burn-out, fast."

The other parents, a brave cadre who had answered Hannibal's distress signal, murmur their agreement as they go from room to room baby-proofing, assembling, and arranging equipment.

After the nursery is completed, the frig and pantry stocked, Hannibal hosts an al fresco lunch out on the back deck where he's the focus of good natured ribbing: poopy blow-outs, projectile vomiting, sleepless nights, days without showering.

As three o'clock approaches, he's given many hugs, kisses, and slaps on the back as his friends file out into the amber afternoon:

"Text if you need advice- day or night!"
"Good luck!"
"Let us know if you need anything!"

Hannibal goes back inside, locks the door, and rests his forehead against its smooth surface. The next time it opens will be when he welcomes his foster son into his home.

My son.

Hannibal's eyes pop open.

My son is coming home...today.

To distract himself, he takes the route the social worker will presumably take when she arrives. He walks down the hallway, past the kitchen and living room, office, bathroom, and into the guest room converted into a nursery. Hannibal stands in the entrance way. He still can't believe it; in just a few short hours a living, breathing baby will be sleeping in this very room.

During lunch, Walt had bragged how, as soon as they'd heard the news, Francesca had masterminded the whole Mommin theme; choosing the bedding, finding reproductions of book covers on etsy, and having them framed.

Hannibal treads lightly across the hardwood until he reaches the rug and peers into the crib.

Francesca had outdone themself here: fluffy, white fleece blanket, white and grey-blue bedding with a toile design of Mommin characters; a soft, baby- blue Mommin stuffie stands

guard in one corner.

He glances over at the bookshelf and smiles at the stuffed figures arranged there: Mumintrollet, Muminpappan, and his favorite, Snusmumriken. They had arrived, just this morning in a package from his mother. The whimsical note had explained that the stuffed friends she'd made for him as a child, had informed her of their desire to meet his son, so she'd sent them on their way.

From their perch, the compadres study their new surroundings with interest.

"Well, what do you think guys? Can we do this? " He inquires of his old friends while practicing raising and lowering the crib rail. Then he refolds the crib blanket and checks to make certain the fitted sheet isn't in danger of popping off the mattress. Next, Hannibal turns his attention to the changing table; running a hand over the neat stacks of diapers, two different sizes for safety's safe, two boxes of wipes and three types of ointment.

He remembers the little boy's horrible rash and the miserable bath, and then that magical moment of connection which lead to his epiphany.

Well I did it! They all thought I was crazy and maybe they're right...but I did it anyway.

He gazes contently around the beautiful, serene room and makes a silent vow:

I *promise, little one, papa will never allow you to suffer like that ...never again.*

Smiling at his own melodrama, he sinks gratefully onto the gliding rocker, borrowed for the sake of economy, and sets it into motion. The movement is smooth and soothing; he easily imagines rocking his son to sleep here, singing the lullabies his father sang to him.

The doorbell, followed by a loud rap on the front door sends him catapulting to his feet.

What time is it? Four? That must be them!

Hannibal speed walks down the hallway, adjusting the cuffs of his sweater and straightening his collar as he goes.
He doesn't bother looking through the peephole, merely unbolts the door and throws it open.

Chapter End Notes

"being called out of one's name" - from "I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings".

The Changeling

Chapter Summary

A baby is brought to Hannibal's home, but is it the right one?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Mrs. Inez is on the front stoop, a plastic garbage bag and briefcase satchel in one hand, a bundled-up baby in the other.

Hannibal can't even see the child's face because he is currently attempting to escape over the woman's shoulder.

"Whoa! Can you grab these!?" The woman thrusts the bag and satchel into Hannibal's hands then pulls the baby back into her arms; it screams in protest.

"Here we go Jonathan!" She proclaims in a bright voice over its yells. "Let's go see your new daddy!"

Hannibal steps aside to allow them to enter, still not having caught a glimpse of the infant's face. He has a sudden, irrational fear that maybe this isn't the right child, that some other poor foundling has been substituted in his stead.

Mrs. Inez seats herself on the couch and huffs a sigh of relief; the baby stubbornly clings to her, burrowing its face into her armpit. "He's going through some transitional and separation anxieties."

"Yes." Hannibal believes it. He feigns nonchalance as he attempts to see the little face when his hood is pulled- off, but the baby never raises his head from the woman's chest. All Hannibal can see over the top of the jacket is a neat, shorn, head of brown hair and two small, pick ears.

"His curls!" Hannibal blurts out nonsensically. "They're gone!"

"Curls?" The social worker runs her hand over the back of the little head."Never saw curls on him. Want to say 'hi' to your new daddy, Jonathan?"

The baby makes no response.

"He had them; only a few weeks ago. May... may I see his face?" *Why would anyone cut off those gorgeous curls? This can't be the same baby!*

Mrs. Inez stands up; she's on a tight schedule. "You have such a lovely home, may I take a quick tour of it?"

Guess that is a 'no.'

"Of course, lead the way."

Mrs. Inez removes a clipboard from her satchel and with the baby-limpet firmly ensconced on one hip, walks through the common areas with Hannibal trailing anxiously behind her. They end-up in the nursery.

"This is adorable! And good... I see you don't have bumpers or pillows in the crib."

"No, and I'll take the stuffed animal out when he sleeps," Hannibal answers, distractedly; he's getting antsier by the minute wondering whom he has just agreed to foster.

"That's fine; it doesn't have any parts which can come off, oh what a cute hippo collection! Did you get them at IKEA?"

"Thank you! But, no... the three over there were made for me by my mother when I was a little boy. They're characters from the Mommin Troll books."

"Huh, never heard of them." She indicates the black garbage bag. " We've started you off with a few essentials, but it's clear you don't need them. May I keep them for the next client?"

"Of course."

"Thank you! Yes...looks like you have everything you need... and you've completed the online classes so you know all about proper nutrition for the first year of life; no dairy, no honey, introduce foods slowly in case of allergies ...it's all pretty much common sense. "

"Right, no dairy, no honey," Hannibal repeats thinking back with a guilty twinge about the milk, cookies, and cheese the boy had surfeited himself on back at his river house.

"Great! And you have the option of bathing him in your kitchen's nice, big sink, but remember an infant can drown in only a few inches of water...but you've been certified, you know all that!"

"Yes," Hannibal agrees feeling flop sweat beginning to bead on his upper lip. "I've completed all the classes... but as you know, I am also a medical doctor."

"Famous last words Doctor!" Mrs. Inez laughs, a lovely rippling sound, which causes the child in her arms to pull away and stare angrily up at her. "Oh! Look who's come-up for air! Jonathan can you say 'hi' to...what would you like to be called Dr. Lecter?"

"Papa," Hannibal replies feeling like he's living someone else's reality.

"Say 'hi' to papa, Jonathan!" Mrs. Inez says, turning sideways so Hannibal can catch a glimpse of the little face; it turns to glare at him before ducking back into the safety of the woman's embrace.

Relief pours over Hannibal's whole body; he'd recognize those eyes anywhere.

"Hello...Jonathan! I'm so happy you're here!" Hannibal quells an impulse to pull the child from the woman; he wonders how much longer this is going to take.

"Isn't that nice? So now you're going to stay with papa, okay, Jonathan?"

As she speaks, Mrs. Inez is slowly pulling the boy away from her. He squawks and digs two chubby fists into her shoulder length hair and hangs on for dear life.

"Owwwww, not so hard Jonathan! Dr. Lecter? Could you help me...yes...just hold him while I try and ...owwwww...its okay Jonathan...just let go..."

As the baby screams in protest, Hannibal and the social worker manage to pry his hands from the woman's hair and his legs from around her waist; finally Hannibal is holding his son in his arms.

Hannibal's vision of a tender reunion is forever dashed when the boy flings his solid little head upwards, smacking the man's jaw so he bites his own tongue.

"Ahhh!" He exclaims, tasting blood.

"Oh, he got you!" Mrs. Inez winches sympathetically her voice raised to carry over the screaming boy. "Baby head-butt! Do you want me to hold him while you go rinse your mouth?"

"No, no, better not; good practice for me."

Hannibal rearranges the child so its head is slamming onto his chest, rather than his face, and goes to the bathroom. It's a bit tricky with a writhing, unhappy, baby, but he manages to rinse his mouth and check his injury.

"No stitches required," he jokes to the social worker who has finished checking the kitchen, pantry, and location of the cleaning supplies.

"And your medications are all stored in a locked cabinet...great! And you know about the infant car seat needing to be in the backseat? He's still a little guy so better keep him in that until your pediatrician gives the okay to switch to the next size up."

Hannibal nods, swaying to and fro as the baby twists and turns in his arms, holding his arms out pleadingly to the woman while crying lustily.

"Bye Jonathan!" She calls above the baby's noise and gives Hannibal a sympathetic look. "He'll calm down as soon as I leave. Then I'll be seeing the both of you here, for our next scheduled appointment. Good luck! Good bye sweetheart, be good!"

As the door closes behind Mrs. Inez, the baby makes a last ditch effort to escape, and would have launched himself out of the man's arms if Hannibal didn't have such a death grip on the waistband of its diminutive jeans.

"Oh, oh! Let's stay here up little man. Stay with papa!"

Hannibal jiggles the boy as he walks to the kitchen hoping a snack might ease the transition.

He offers a zwieback, already plated, but the boy angrily smacks it out of his hand.

"Alright... I agree! Those are pretty tasteless. How about a bottle?"

Hannibal has never been so glad for anything in his life when he opens the frig to see a row of pre-mixed bottles Francesca prepared that afternoon.

"Thank God," he says in all seriousness as he fits the bottle into the warmer. Then, still swaying and jiggling for dear life, he takes the screeching child on a tour around his new home.

"Good thing I told the neighbors about you, Jonathan, " he observes grimly," or papa might be getting complaints...so let's walk around your new home! Jonathan...here is the living room... papa's office... and you've already seen the kitchen... the hallway...your bathroom ...your room..."

Hannibal heads back to the kitchen to see if the warmer's indicator light is off; it is.

He places the baby on the floor so he can shake and test the bottle and when he turns back again, it's just in time to see two little stockinged feet crawling around the corner.

"Ne, ne, ateik čia!" He yelps, running to catch-up to the escapee who screams in frustration when he's recaptured and hoisted into Hannibal's arms. " Laikykis! Milk! Remember? I know you like milk!"

But this time, the promise of milk, doesn't appease the child who pushes against Hannibal's chest like he's Sisyphus pushing his boulder uphill. "Mama! Mama! Mama!" The boy screams and the man gloomily wonders for whom he's calling; his real mother? A foster mother? The social worker?"

He cradles the boy's squirming head over his own racing heart and walks a continuous circuit around the house, showing the baby the bottle now and again, only to have it pushed away every time.

Hannibal stops in front of the hall mirror hoping the child might be distracted by seeing its own reflection. Hannibal shifts the baby so his back is flush against his chest; its little legs dangle from their perch across his forearm.

A cherry-cheeked infant with swollen, red eyes, and fine, sweaty hair, bucks in protest.

"Jonathan, Jonathan," Hannibal murmurs, kissing the top of the hot, little head, "You really need to calm down." He decides to risk the child's further wrath by sitting it on the couch in order to remove its outer garments.

"Shhhh, shhhh! Don't you remember me sweetheart?" He pleads, pulling off the boy's jacket and shirt until he is clad in just his onesie, elastic waist jeans, and one sock; Hannibal hadn't

noticed when the other one had gone missing.

"Waaaaaaaaa!"

The wailing continues unabated until the boy develops hiccups which slows but doesn't stop him. Finally, after an hour of continuous screaming, the baby switches to the high, grumbling whine Hannibal recalls from before. He tries the bottle again but the boy bats it away. In growing desperation, Hannibal offers the rusk but gets the same response."Come on buddy, you have to take something," he gently chides the child while running his fingers through the damp hair, mourning the loss of the curls.

"EH!" The baby grunts, moving his head away from the caressing hand.

"Well, I need a drink!"

Hannibal goes to the refrigerator and pulls out a bottle of homemade lassis he suspects David left for him, and drinks straight from the carafe.

The baby stops grousing to watch. Amused, Hannibal pauses to look down into the resentful little face.

"Want yours?"

Hannibal indicates the now cooled bottle once more.

"EH!"

"Eh? Does that mean no?"

Rather than attempting to reply, the baby stretches his body out and away from the man; but Hannibal anticipates the movement and easily adjusts his grip.

"Ah, ah! Hold on, Jonathan! Papa needs some bread."

Not wanting to risk a knife, Hannibal grasps the end of the brown, sweet smelling loaf and rips off a hunk. Even without butter or jam, it's probably the best thing he's ever eaten. He hums appreciatively and grins at the sour little creature eyeing it suspiciously.

"Yum! Want a bit?"

Surprisingly, the boy's mouth opens in response.

"Eh!"

"Eh? I thought that meant 'no.' "

"EH!"

"Alright! Here you go!" Hannibal places a shred of bread into the little mouth and quickly pulls his fingers clear of the snapping jaw and tiny teeth.

"EH!"

"Jonathan!? You used to be able to say more than just 'eh.' Can you say more?"

The baby stiffens and screams his frustration.

"EHHHHHHHH!"

Hannibal rips another tiny portion of bread and holds it in front of the boy's mouth. "Eh!" The baby crows triumphantly and gobbles it down.

Hannibal shakes with laughter; the baby stares at him dubiously.

"You will have me very well trained, before you're done. I can see that."

He carries the boy to the brand new highchair and attempts to place him inside; it's like trying to thread two resisting, wriggling, snakes into a pair of slacks.

"EHHHHHHH!" The boy screams, clinging to him.

Well at least he wants me he now.

"Fine, you win, but I need to sit down."

He carries the baby into the nursery and settles onto the rocker. The boy protests at first, but stops as soon as he's offered another morsel of bread.

"Eh!" The boy observes opening his mouth and glancing around his surroundings as he chews. Now that the child has calmed down, Hannibal leans back, the better to observe him. The same sweeping lashes , but with the precious curls gone, the little face appears thinner and older.

To Hannibal however, he biggest change is in the boy's eyes; they're duller, more guarded than Hannibal remembers them being.

"It's alright, little one, it will take some time to get to know one another! Isn't that right, Jonathan?"

The boy continues his perusal of the room, showing no signs he recognizes his name.

After four weeks? And he's had a hearing test presumably.

"Jonathan?"

The baby does not turn his way.

"More?"

The baby immediately turns and opens his mouth.

"Mah! Mak!"

Hannibal's own mouth drops; if Mommintroll himself had spoken, he wouldn't have been any less surprised.

"Milk?"

"Yah."

"So you *do* know how to speak! Alright, let's get your bottle."

They return to the kitchen and sure enough, as soon as the baby spots the bottle he reaches for it.

"It's not warm," Hannibal warns, but presumably that is not a deterrent because as soon as its placed in his grasp, the baby tilts his head back and begins suckling enthusiastically.

A tender, warm, feeling spreads throughout Hannibal and he arranges the little body until it is resting supine in his arms.

This is more like it!

He walks back to the nursery and settles them back on the rocker where the snuffling sounds of the boy's breathing and sucking serve as a counterpoint to the soft creak of the glider.

Hannibal is once again looking into the pure blue of the child's eyes as it studies him critically.

"What do you think little one? Am I the oldest papa you have ever seen?"

The boy's milky lips pop off the nipple.

"Yah," he remarks then resumes drinking.

"Yah? Oh dear, that's what I was afraid of. Jonathan...Jonathan...you know... you look nothing like a Jonathan to me....let's see if you can recognize your own?"

Hannibal recites several popular boys' names but the infant's affect never alters.

"Kuo tu vardu? How about these? Algimas... Benejaminas..." Hannibal recites as he runs his fingers through the child's soft hair. "Rytas... Paulinus..." The baby sucking has slowed now, his eyes glued to Hannibal's face. "You like those names? They're beautiful aren't they? They're all names of men in my family." He smiles into the innocent little face. "But you know my favorite? The one I would name you if I was permitted? Vincentas! That was my grandfather's name."

At first mention of the name, the boy stops sucking.

"What? Do you recognize that name? Vincentas? "

Chapter End Notes

another cliff hanger- ha ha!
But don't worry, for the sake of realism, the baby does NOT recognize the name, but our clever Hannibal is going to make everything all better :0)

Reader Poll:

If I were to commision an artist to make an illustration(s) for this story, which scene(s) would you like to see?

Just leave your idea in the comments or you at my Tumblr anislandcalledcalifornia if you prefer to be anon.

See you next chapter

Kuo tu vardu? - what is your name.

Getting To Know You

Chapter Summary

Hannibal discovers how hard being a daddy really is.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Of course the baby does not answer, but he does pull the nipple from his mouth, and stare at Hannibal contemplatively; an embryonic Socrates.

"Vincentas?" Hannibal repeats wonderingly.

The little body tenses and then the unmistakable aroma of baby poop fills the room.

"Oh my?!" Hannibal laughs." You were working on a different sort of problem, weren't you?!"

His mission accomplished, the baby placidly returns to his bottle.

Shaking his head and chuckling, Hannibal gets up to change his son's first diaper in his new nursery. "Well, my tėvukas would certainly have appreciated the joke. He always did enjoy a good laugh!" Hannibal collects his supplies before laying the child on the changing table. Jonathan scowls, flings his bottle to the ground and tries to flip over.

"Ne, ne, Jonathan... we need to get you all clean." Hannibal gently presses the struggling baby onto his back then notices the stash of rattles and toys set along the table. Their purpose is now abundantly clear and he blesses Walt's insistence that they remain there.

"EEHHHHH!"

"Look! Look at this!"Hannibal grabs a tube filled with multicolored beads and miniature figures. "Can you find the doggie?"

Guided by instinct, the baby grabs the toy and shakes it angrily.

"Inside, Jonathan...look inside at all the little toys!" Hannibal quickly places a clean diaper under the dirty one which he expertly removes and sets aside.

So far, so good.

"Eh!"

"Nearly done," Hannibal fibs," just have to wipe you! Can you see the dinosaur inside the tube?"

"Eh! Eh! Eh!" The baby shakes the toy a few times then lets it drop to the floor. "Uh oh!"

"Uh oh...but almost done...where's Jonathan's nose?"

Hannibal attempts to hurry, but practicing on a doll is nothing like changing a living, wriggling baby. The boy's whines are changing in timbre, threatening to become screeches by the time Hannibal pulls the tabs of the new diaper off their backings, only to discover he's placed the whole thing on backwards.

"SHIT!"

The oath pops-out before he can censure himself and it's effect is immediate; the baby freezes and stares into Hannibal's face.

"Sorry! I'm not mad!" Hannibal assures the infant as he grasps the baby's ankles in one hand to fix the diaper. The boy lies completely still as he's diapered and re-snapped into his onesie.

"Don't be afraid, sweetheart," Hannibal murmurs, his stomach twisting in knots when he feels the tiny heart hammering under his palm, "papa isn't mad."

Rather than complete dressing him, Hannibal pulls the infant into his arms and presses him close. Jonathan has gone still, like a fawn or rabbit kitten attempting to elude a predator's notice. Wildly repentant, Hannibal nuzzles his face against the downy head as he pulls the blanket from the crib and wraps it around the baby. Jonathan is small enough that Hannibal can wedge his head neatly under his own chin; the boy's cheek is soft and warm against his Adam's apple. He heads to the rocker and sits down. The baby immediately pops his head off Hannibal's chest.

"Ehh!"

"No rocking?" Hannibal asks as they continue to glide back and forth.

"EHHH!" Jonathan whines, squirming now.

Well at least he's over his fright.

Hannibal stands up; the baby relaxes and snuggles back against his chest.

"Papa can't sit?"

"Eh!" The baby says from around his thumb.

"Alright Jonathan, this time we walk."

Hannibal hums and pats the padded bottom, as they walk laps around their home. Each time they pass the hall mirror, Hannibal turns sideways so he can monitor the babe's face in its reflection. Two, bright, wide-awake eyes meet his from the depth of the blanket on the first

ten circuits, on the eleventh, they are at half-mast, by the twelfth, they are closed. The tiny body is a deadweight in Hannibal's tired arms.

Finally! Because I really need to take a leak!

Hannibal carries his precious bundle into the nursery and slowly lowers it into the crib. *Ha! That wasn't so hard! I think...*

The moment the child's back touches the mattress, he starts awake. Quick as an acrobat, the baby rolls from his back to his side and sits-up, beseechingly raising his arms.

"Waaaaaaah!"

There is no lead-up to this full-blown scream, no whimpers or grousing, just a panicked cry which slices through the air.

"Jonathan, it's alright! "

Hannibal struggles to remain calm as he mentally sifts through all the disparate advice he's been given and read about: "Ferberizing," family bed, wear-your baby, car rides, strollers. They swirl uselessly through his head like autumn leaves.

Seeing he is to be left, the baby flings himself towards the bars and grabs them with wee hands; tears already streaming down his face.

Hannibal caves.

He lifts the baby out and settles him in his arms. Like magic, the crying stops. Then the boy grabs two fistfuls of Hannibal's sweater and rubs his face back and forth to leave behind a glistening snail-trail of baby snot. Satisfied at last, the boy tucks his own head under Hannibal's chin, pops his right thumb into his mouth and begins to suck contentedly.

From start to finish the whole scenario takes less than two minutes; Hannibal marvels at how much pathos can be crammed into such a short amount of time.

However, the concept of walking another five miles for so little pay-off does not appeal and nature is calling. Hannibal walks into the baby's bathroom and lifts the lid of the toilet. The boy stops sucking his thumb to observe the operation with interest, but at the first indication he is to be placed down, screams his disapproval.

"Ehhhhhh!"

"Just so daddy can go potty!"

Hannibal sits the baby on the bathmat and sprints back to the toilet. Even before he can unzip his trousers, the baby has crawled to him, and flung himself against his slippered feet.

"Whoa! Baby boy!? Papa needs to use the toilet!"

He picks-up the infant who latches onto his sweater and stares down at the toilet. "Really not my problem right now, papa!" Hannibal imagines his thought bubble to be.
Then Hannibal has a brainstorm.

" Eureka! The saucer!" Gleefully, Hannibal swings the baby up into the air. "The saucer, Jonathan!"

The boy has no idea what it all means, but Hannibal's excellent mood is contagious. He smiles and wriggles and would have kicked Hannibal in the face with his bare feet if he hadn't been lowered again.

"To the Bat-Saucer Robin!"

Alright, so perhaps the saucer wasn't the huge success I'd hoped it would be, but at least he's secure.

Hannibal had seen plenty of babies happily distracted by the saucer-shaped seat with its many attachments, so he knows its efficacy. But, just as with the highchair,crib and glider, Jonathan is proving not to be a fan.

"EHHHHH!" The baby screams when he's lowered into the seat. His pudgy arms aimlessly hit the attached toys which flash, and squeak, and play tunes; Jonathan could care less. He pushes up off the platform which sets the whole saucer into motion. Hannibal manages to urinate and wash his hands while the baby pistons up and down squawking his disapproval.

The man has nearly finished drying his hands, when the miracle occurs; the baby's face is split by an enormous, pink yawn. Hannibal watches, enthralled and hopeful. Jonathan recovers from his yawn and looks around dopily, big, blue eyes winking, just as shocked as Hannibal by this new development. He looks up into Hannibal's face and raises his arms.

Hannibal pulls the baby out of the seat and Jonathan snuggles up against the man, sighing deeply. Hannibal returns to the nursery and sits them on the rocker.

Jonathan grumbles behind his thumb and flops his head from side to side, but Hannibal continues to rock. This time, he doesn't need to see the boy's face to know when he's fallen asleep; the warm, little body seems to melt onto his chest.

Thank God!. Shit...where is that blanket?

Hannibal searches all over for the fleece before finally finding it behind the couch in the living room. He gingerly squats to scoop it up.

Note to self; never leave anything you might need on the ground.

He straightens; the baby sleeps on.

Yes!

This time, when Jonathan is placed in the crib, he whines and flings both arms above his head, but doesn't wake.

Hannibal stands at the rail and gazes down. Every saccharine clique about sleeping babies and their preciousness makes sense to him now. Jonathan's cheeks are a soft pink and his rosebud lips suckle at an invisible nipple. Hannibal worked hard for this blessed unconsciousness; yet he can't seem to tear himself away. Hopefully, the babe will sleep for a few hours so he can go get some work done. Hannibal carefully arranges the blanket, and tiptoes out of the room.

Hannibal has just finished a snack and is going through his phone and email messages when he hears it.

"Eh."

No...it can't be...

"Ehh!"

It's only been...twenty minutes?!

"WAAAAAAA!"

I am in way over my head.

Chapter End Notes

chapter title borrowed from "The King and I"

May There Always Be Sunshine

Chapter Summary

Hannibal calls for help.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Hannibal stands and wearily heads back to the nursery but doesn't go inside; he's recalling Francesca's last-minute advice. "If the baby wakes-up in the middle of a nap or during the night, give him a couple minutes, he'll probably settle down again."

Hovering in the hallway, Hannibal hopes they're right because Jonathan's cat nap seems to have reinvigorated the baby to an alarming degree.

"WAAAAAAA!"

Sounds of the crib's rail rattling.

He's strong in spite of his size.

"WAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!"

Eik miegoti angelėli ...

"WAAAAAAAAAAA!"

Kaip man ištverti visą naktį?

"WAAAAAAAAAA...WAAAAAAA...WAAAAA!!"

Hannibal walks into the nursery like a "dead man walking."

Fury has made Jonathan preternaturally strong. He's pulled himself to a standing position and clings to the top of the rail while bellowing at the top of his lungs.

"That was a quick nap Jonathan!" Hannibal remarks grimly as he lifts the baby up and does a quick diaper check before carrying him out to the kitchen.

"Are you hungry? Would you like something to eat?"

Overtired and over stimulated, Jonathan rubs his hot, wet face across Hannibal's chest and screams. The microwave's clock catches Hannibal's eye.

Six forty-nine? What the F.... ? That means I've only been doing this... for less than three hours!?

Hannibal grabs his landline; he needs reinforcements.

"Hello?"

"Walt!"

"Hannibal? Is the baby alright?"

"Yes and no...I was hoping..." Hannibal shifts the baby to his other side; his ears are ringing.

"Frannie could come over?" Like a good attorney, Walt, has anticipated him.

"If it's not too..."

"It's not...hold on a sec."

Hannibal walks and jiggles as Walt goes to find his spouse.

"No trouble; give them twenty minutes...they'll probably have Malcolm with them. Is that cool?"

"Yes!"

Walt laughs at the desperation in his friends's voice.

"I hear him... he sounds tired. Have you tried rocking him?"

Hannibal rolls his eyes. "Are you serious right now?"

The other man laughs. "Don't get all pissy with me dude...just running through the bloody obvious."

"Sorry...sorry...it's just this crying..."

"It's making you crazy, I can tell. Hey, I gotta go, we're just getting dinner on the table."

"Walt, I'm..."

"Don't even worry about it! Frannie's got the baby's bag packed and ready to go...they'll see you soon. Hang-in there!"

"Thanks...! I owe you one!"

"It's all good...Give the baby a kiss for me!"

"I will, bye."

"Bye bye."

Seventeen minutes later, Francesca knocks on the door carrying a backpack, a cooler, and their six month old in a sling. They give Hannibal a quick peck on the cheek.

"Woooooo! We could hear him all the way outside! What're you doing to that poor baby?"

Hannibal could weep with relief.

"Frannie... I think I'm going crazy. Hi Malcolm! Jonathan? Meet your cousin Malcolm and your auntie Francesca!"

Malcolm stares at the other baby with the absorption of an anthropologist doing field work. Resentful of the scrutiny of strangers, Jonathan screams angrily and turns his face away.

Francesca ruffles their own boy's wild curls and places his bag on the couch. "Thought you said he had curly hair? Why'd you give him a haircut?"

"I didn't! Someone buzzed him," Hannibal protests, following his friend into the kitchen.

"Humph. He looks like he's ready to be shipped-off. We brought you some dinner; stroganoff."

Hannibal closes his eyes and sniffs happily. "You're an angel! I'm starving!"

Francesca laughs. "How long have you been carrying him? He looks ready for a nap."

Hannibal gives a hollow laugh. "It took me two hours to get him down for a twenty minute catnap."

Francesca whistles appreciably. "Well, that sucks! How about I give the boys a bath while you eat and take a little break?"

"Really? You think you could? Both of them at the same time?"

"Honey, I got this! Just let me get everything set-up; shouldn't take too long, then you can bring him in."

Francesca goes to prepare the bath while Hannibal goes to the nursery to pick-out a sleeper.

"Footie pajamas or sleep sack?" He calls out.

"Sleep sack!"

"What size diaper does Malcolm need?"

"That's okay!" Francesca appears in the nursery doorway with Malcolm who's now clad only in a diaper." We use the cloth insert kind."

Jonathan stops mid-cry to lift his head and examine the other baby.

"I love it when they do this," Francesca whispers, "babies always find other babies fascinating."

Hannibal walks over so the boys can get a better look at one another. Malcolm smiles and wriggles, showing two pearly white teeth then hides his head on his mother's chest; flirting. Jonathan lifts his head from Hannibal's shoulder to see where the other baby went, and at that moment, Malcolm's head pops-up.

Jonathan laughs.

Hannibal's eyes sting with tears as he watches the two babies play their own version of peek a boo.

" Frannie," Hannibal murmurs, not wanting to spoil the moment, " that is the first time I've ever heard him laugh."

Francesca's own eyes fill with tears as they lay a gentle hand on Hannibal's arm. "Oh, sweetie...he is going to have such a good life with you...with all of us. Everything is going to be okay. Let's get them in the tub and some stroganoff into you."

"Sounds great."

Knowing Jonathan's prejudice about the changing table, Hannibal sits on the rocking chair to disrobe him. The onesie comes off easily enough and the newly orphaned sock with it.

"You'll need to buy socks in bulk," Francesca says as they set-up Malcolm's bath seat and places their baby into it. "How steady is he at sitting?"

"Very...but do you think we should put him in a seat too?"

"Just put this down for now, see how he likes it," Francesca replies, handing Hannibal a thin bath towel to place into the tub.

"Ba!!!" Jonathan cries, reaching out towards the tub.

"You like your bath?" Francesca smiles up at the little boy.

Jonathan turns solemn, looking down at the other naked cherub splashing and kicking.

"Yah!"

The adults laugh.

"In you go little one."

Hannibal takes Jonathan's diaper off and places him onto the submerged towel.

Malcolm twists around to see his company and squeals; Jonathan laughs and kicks his legs back and forth splashing himself in the face. Shocked, he looks at the other baby and they both giggle and kick their feet to splash and raise waves. Grinning, Francesca hands each baby a couple teething toys which they immediately stuff into their mouths; Hannibal beams with pride.

"He has a lot of torso strength. How old is he again?"

"Between seven and nine months."

"Hmmm...looks more like nine going on ten. His expressive speech is really good. Okay papa....go eat. You're going to need your strength."

Hannibal manages to tear himself away from his baby to go re-heat his dinner. He drags a chair outside the bathroom so he can watch and pick-up pointers while he eats."This is delicious by the way...Walt knows his way around paprika," Hannibal says, amazed and envious at how his friend handles two babies at once.

Francesca shampoos Malcolm's hair while Jonathan watches enthralled. "What have you decided about sleeping arrangements?"

Hannibal noticeably wilts.

"Honesty, I have no idea. What do you guys do?"

"Malcolm's in the room with us, Steven shares with Eli but he's still coming-in most nights so we have a sleeping bag under the bed that he just pulls-out. I know it's time to get-up when I hear Walt trip over Stevie."

Francesca finishes with Malcolm and looks over their shoulder.

"Wanna do his hair? I'd rather have him hate you than me," they smirk when Jonathan stops chewing his toy to eye the bottle warily.

"Wow...thanks," Hannibal deadpans and sets his empty plate down.

"Careful...they smell fear," Francesca jokes as they trade places.

Jonathan drops a plastic cup and stares at him suspiciously; at least that's what it feels like to Hannibal.

"No fear..." Francesca whispers in a dramatic voice while poking Hannibal on the ass; he jumps and glares over his shoulder.

Jonathan begins whining and twists, trying to wriggle away. On the other side of the tub, Malcolm has stopped playing as well; his mouth droops down at the sides and begins to cry

in sympathy.

His fears reinforced, Jonathan quickly follows suit; their combined cries bounce off the tiled room in a deafening cacophony.

Francesca scoops Malcolm up and wraps him in a towel. Safe in his parent's arms, he quiets quickly though he keeps his eyes peeled on the action in the tub. "It's alright sugar bean," Francesca croons as they dries his hair," Jonathan's just getting his hair washed."

Hannibal manages to distract Jonathan enough that he allows his head to get wet, but at the reintroduction of the shampoo bottle he begins to cry again.

"Wow, he really does not like that! Try not to get any soap in his eyes!"

" Not helping!" Driven to desperation, Hannibal beings to sing; his voice rings-out in the enclosed space:

"Пусть всегда будет солнце..."

Jonathan stops struggling to stare up at him. Encouraged, Hannibal quickly lathers his hands and works the suds into the boy's hair.

"Пусть всегда будет небо..."

He grasps Johnathan's shoulders and gently tilts him back to rinse-off his head.

"Пусть всегда будет papa..."

Hannibal smiles triumphantly as he gives Jonathan's body one final rise.

"Пусть всегда буду я!"

He finishes with a flourish and lifts his dripping son from the tub to wrap him in a towel. Hannibal turns and beams smugly at his stunned audience. Even Francesca, he smarmily notes, has been rendered speechless. He kisses Jonathan's damp cheek and laughs and laughs and laughs.

Chapter End Notes

Pust Vsegda Budet Solntse" (May There Always Be Sunshine)
A song traditonally sung by Young Pioneers

May there always be sunshine,
May there always be blue skies,
May there always be mummy(Hannibal substituted papa :0)
May there always be me!

Author's Notes:
I don't know whether Hannibal would have sung this in Russian but for the sake of ease, he is here.

Eik miegoti angelėli - Go back to sleep litle angel
Kaip man ištverti visą naktį?- how am I going to get through a whole night?

Francesca's preferred pronouns are they/them. Sometimes they are also referred to as Fisher. If any reader catches me messing-up with the pronouns, please point it out to me.

Thanks :0)

Vincas

Chapter Summary

Hannibal finds out a bit more about his foster son's background.

Chapter Notes

This chapter is dedicated to two lovely and talented artists: calamity-jane and themoonrulznny.
Thank you both <3 <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"Do you have a pediatrician yet?"

While Hannibal was wrestling his squirmy baby onto the changing table's padded surface, Francesca had diapered, dressed, and resettled Malcolm onto their hip. They stand close by Jonathan's head and offer him a toy. The unhappy baby pulls it from their hand, but drops it immediately. Malcolm chortles.

"I do, actually..." Hannibal fastens the diaper tabs while Jonathan flops like a fish."Dr. Shrinivasan; she's the wife of a colleague."

A moment later, he breathes a sigh of relief when he helps his diapered baby into a seated position.

Francesca nods and hands him a onesie which Hannibal manages to wrangle onto the boy without too much effort. "Peek-a-boo!" He coos, threading the baby's flailing arms through the armholes.

"Eh! Eh!" Jonathan exclaims, scowling and wriggling.

"I'll go get their food ready while you finish-up in here."

"Thank you," Hannibal says, distractedly; Jonathan clearly doesn't appreciate the cute, doggie-themed booties the man is pulling onto his little feet, but the boy is so bleary-eyed with fatigue his struggles are weakening. Once both booties are firmly velcroed, Hannibal pulls the warm, little body into his arms. Jonathan instantly pushes his head under the man's chin, grabs a fistful of Hannibal's sweater in one stubby fist, and begins to suck his thumb.

Hannibal stands for a moment, instinctively swaying back and forth, relishing the feeling of a warm, sleepy baby in his arms. This is what he imagined and hoped fatherhood would feel like, and he wants to imprint this moment into his memory forever.

" Vincentas, Vincentas...don't fall asleep just yet, aren't you hungry?"

Jonathan's head pops-up; he peers at Hannibal.

"Yah!"

Hannibal laughs.

"Aš tave myliu... Ar myli mane?"

Jonathan stares at Hannibal's mouth as he listens to the unfamiliar words.

"Don't worry.....you'll be speaking Lithuanian with Papa in no time, " Hannibal promises following the smell of food to the kitchen where he witnesses a sweet, domestic scene; Malcolm sitting in the highchair, eating cooked yams as quickly as Francesca can spoon them into his mouth.

"Slow down! Chew a little!" They laugh at their greedy son. "Hey!" Francesca greets Hannibal, "Feel free to give him whatever I brought...Boy! He's looking sleepy!"

As though in response, Jonathan rubs his eyes with a pink fist and yawns. Malcolm, watching his big cousin, catches his yawn; a glob of yams falls from his mouth onto the tray. Before their son can notice it's absence, Francesca scoops it up and back into his open mouth. "I have some sago cereal I've mixed with breast milk if you'd like some; Malcolm's had his fill."

"That sounds intriguing," Hannibal says, finding a bib and snapping it around Jonathan's neck. "If you think you have enough."

"No worries...I made a whole container...Malcolm's like his daddy...a real chow-hound when the mood strikes him. We're almost done here if you want the chair."

Hannibal finds the bowl of cereal and sits down at the island with Jonathan on his lap. The baby begins to whine and bat at the bowl with his hands.

"Ah, ah...you'll be feed little one... first a bib...good...alright; Prašau!! Open-up."

Jonathan obediently opens his mouth and Hannibal spoons a bit of cereal into it. The baby's face wrinkles at the taste and he pushes the mush back-out with his tongue, shaking his head furiously.

"Eh! Eh! Eh!"

"No go, huh?" Hannibal concedes, scraping rejected cereal off the boy's chin.

"Here...try some of these," Francesca suggests, handing Hannibal the bowl of yams.

" Prašau!" Hannibal repeats, and Jonathan trustingly opens his mouth. Hannibal feeds him a smidgen of yams.

"Success!" Hannibal calls, as Jonathan hums his approval and opens his mouth for more.

"Great! I'm going to go nurse Malcolm on the couch...help yourself to applesauce."

Francesca and Malcolm leave and Hannibal places Jonathan into the highchair. This time, intent on food, the baby, doesn't mind being strapped in.He hums happily as he's feed the rest of the yams, and all of the applesauce, smacking his hand on the tray whenever Hannibal pauses too long between bites.

Ten minutes later, Francesca reappears with Malcolm fast asleep in his sling.

"Good eater!" They smile at the boy in the seat. "Did CS tell you if he has any food sensitivities?"

"They didn't... should I worry about that?"

"Well...it would help if you knew, but don't worry...you'll figure it out as you go along...he seems like he's still hungry."

"Is kongbap okay?"

"Sure! I bet he'll love it!"

While Hannibal heats-up the rice, Francesca gathers their supplies.

"Going to take off now," they say, kissing the top of Jonathan's head. The baby twists sideways to look up at them and smiles.

"Eh!"

"'Eh', to you too little man!" They laugh and give Hannibal a quick hug and kiss goodbye. "Be good for papa! Let him sleep tonight!" They laugh again at the look of uncertainty on Hannibal's face. "Don't worry...you'll do great! Just pick a system and stick with it...babies are adaptable," they head into the hallway. " Give us a call tomorrow to let us know how it went...no, don't bother coming to the door, I'll see myself out...'night Jonathan!"

The baby doesn't look-up at his name and the adults share a look.

"Doesn't seem like he's attached to that name...will you rename him if he stays?"

Hannibal shakes his head. "I'm not certain, but I would like to. I'll need to check with the caseworker."

"Fisher is a good choice," they hint as they head towards the front door, " talk to you soon!"

Hannibal feeds the baby all of the rice dish and offers him a baby bottle of water. While the boy drinks, the man heats-up formula.

"Like a baby nightcap," he comments and goes to bolt the door. He returns to a very sated and sleepy baby rubbing his eyes and pulling at his bib.

"Eh!!!"

"Off!" Hannibal suggests, wiping the boy's face before removing the bib.

"Yah," Jonathan agrees moving his face side to side to avoid the cloth.

As soon as Hannibal removes the tray, the baby tries to hurl himself off.

"Wait! Vincas! Gal galeciau jums padeti?"

The baby stops and looks up into Hannibal's face.

"Yah!"

Astonished, Hannibal unsnaps the seatbelt and pulls the boy into his arms.

"Vincas?"

The boy's large, blue eyes stare into the man's for a moment before he nestles against Hannibal's chest and begins sucking his thumb. Hannibal pulls the bottle from the warmer and screws the nipple on; the baby demandingly reaches for it.

"Eh!"

"Pienas...Milk."

"Mak!"

Hannibal hands the boy the bottle and settles him into his arms. The baby suckles, drinking thirstily, and Hannibal carries him into the nursery and, quickly as possible, pulls on a sleep sack and snaps it closed. Then he carries the drowsy baby to the rocker and rocks until the boy's death grip on the bottle loosens and the round eyes are no longer fluttering open and shut. Hannibal carefully pulls the empty bottle out of the baby's hands and sets it aside.

He continues to rock while gazing down at the sweet, unconscious face. Then he gently kisses the boy's soft cheeks, forehead, nose, and eyelids ; mapping the contours of the baby's face and learning his scent. Hannibal understands that he has fallen as deeply in love with this child as if he'd been his own...and yet... the boy he now thinks of as Vincas is not his; may never be. Hannibal's petition for adoption has been filed, but parental rights have yet to be officially severed; nothing is certain.

Hannibal slowly rises and carries the babe to the crib. This time, he has made certain the rail is down and the blanket is pushed to one side. He gently lies the boy onto his back and covers him with the blanket. Hannibal raises the railing, wincing when it clicks loudly into place. The baby sleeps on; Hannibal releases his breath and smiles.

"Sleep well Vincas...we've made it through our first day together...papa loves you very much, " he whispers.

"WAAAAAAH"

Hannibal is a boy again, clutching his little sister's hand as they walk down an unfamiliar street. Somewhere a dog is crying but no matter how hard they search, they can't find it.

"WAAAAA!"

Hannibal starts awake; it's dark, hours before dawn. Vincas is crying. Too sleepy to bother looking at the time, Hannibal staggers out of bed and down the hallway.

"WAAAAAAA...WAAAAAA....WAAAAAA."

Vincas has clearly been awake for awhile and has worked himself into a full-blown tantrum. Hannibal turns on the hall-light and the crying cuts off. The man stands still, maybe the boy has fallen back asleep?

"WAAAAAAAAA...WAAAAAAAAH."

As much as Hannibal would like to carry the baby back to his own room to secure a few more hours of sleep, he's decided that they each need their own space. He walks into the darkened nursery where the baby is standing at the rail, arms beseechingly outstretched.

"Shhhh...shhh...time for sleep little one, " he whispers, coming up to the crib and caressing the baby's head. The boy's face is wet with tears and Hannibal's stomach contracts with guilt. He sniffs; no poop. He feels the front of the boy's diaper; it barely bulges so he knows it doesn't need changing.

So close to his goal of being rescued, Vincas throws himself against the railing. His sleep suit makes it hard for him to move his legs, but he manages to bounce up and down while screeching his misery.

Oh my God, Hannibal moans to himself. *This is horrible...if this doesn't work; I'm bringing him into bed with me.*

Hannibal continues to pat and speak soothingly to the baby who continues to cry and scream and demand to be picked-up; even managing a new word in his frenzy.

"Uuu...uuu."

He's saying 'up!' Hannibal agonizes, feeling his own tears forming at this ordeal.

Finally, after fifteen minutes, the baby flings himself backwards then flops facedown onto the mattress. He whines piteously, rubbing his hot, wet, face against the blanket. Hannibal's heart aches as he leans over to rub the baby's back.

"Papa is here little one...Papa loves you and will stay with you." He says over and over again.

The minutes tick past.

The baby cries as though he's lost his only friend in the world. Hannibal's own, hot tears splash onto the mattress as he uncomfortably leans over the railing to stroke the boy's back and head.

Finally, still crying, Vincas turns his head and looks up at Hannibal. Even in the low light, the man can see the betrayal in the blue eyes and it nearly breaks his resolve.

"*Pick a system and stick with it,"* Francesca had advised him.

I am! But this is so much harder than I'd expected, he complains to the shade of his friend.

"It's alright...it's alright." He continues to croon. The pain in his back and neck seem a proper penance for putting the baby through such an ordeal. Eyes fixed on his foster father, Vincas huffs then put his thumb into his mouth. Hannibal hopes this is a good sign. The baby continues to whimper as he contorts himself into unlikely positions. Hannibal keeps his vigil until the boy sighs heavily before falling fast asleep.

The man straightens and stretches his stiff neck and back.*This is why people have children in their twenties,* he slowly shuffles to his bedroom with his eyes half- shut. He reaches his bed and climbs in, not bothering to note the time. For all he knows, Vincas will be repeating this whole process in another half hour and his body feels weighed-down with fatigue. Sleep is all he can think about at the moment.

"WAAAAAAAHHHHHHH"

Hannibal opens his eyes; 6:45AM.

Time to get up and do it all over again.
Hannibal enters the nursery, but this time, turns on the light. Vincas stops crying and begins jumping up and down a smile on his face; the aroma of baby-poop fills the room.

"Did you go poop?" Hannibal asks, pulling the happy boy out of the crib.

"Eh!"

"Poop is an automatic 'get out of jail free card,'" Hannibal remarks, placing the baby onto the changing table. Before he manages to unsnap the sleepsack, his jaw is smacked by what feels like a bag of cement.

"Oufff! " He exclaims, eyes watering from the sudden impact of two very solid little feet kicking his face.

The baby goes still and stares at him with large eyes.

Hannibal forces himself to smile warmly.

"That's alright little one," he assures the boy, capitalizing on this rare moment of inactivity by unsnapping the sleep sack and unfastening the baby's diaper," Papa needs to be more careful where he puts his face."

Vincas finds his thumb and lies passively as he's cleaned, diapered, and dressed in a fresh onesie. As he works, Hannibal monologues about their plans for the day.

"....And after breakfast, how about going to the park? Or the zoo?"

"Eh!"

"Yes?"

"Yah!"

"Good!"

Suddenly, Hannibal presses his mouth onto the baby's round belly and blows a raspberry. The boy tenses, not understanding what is happening. Hannibal raises his head and smiles.

"Aren't you ticklish?"

He does it again, and this time, little fingers attach onto his hair and pull gleefully as the boy shrieks and squirms with laughter.

Hannibal straightens-up, laughing.

"Ah ha! You are ticklish!"

Laughing Vincas lifts both legs up and slams them back down on the table.

"Mah!"

"More?"

"Yah!"

Hannibal tickles the baby again then, pulls him into his arms while he's still laughing.

"Ready to eat?"

"Eee!"

"Yes! Eat!"

Hannibal goes into the kitchen and warms a bottle as he prepares cereal and mixes in plum puree.

"In you go," he says placing Vincas into the chair and securing the seat belt.

"EHH!" The baby yells angrily and smashes his palms into the tray.

Hannibal hurries, but it still takes him a few minutes to warm everything and place a bib around the baby's neck. By the time he's ready, Vincas is crying and Hannibal is flushed and harried.

" Laikykis! Hold on!" He pleads pulling a stool next to the highchair and perching on it. "Prašau! Here you go!" He says, spooning cereal into the baby's open mouth.

The baby swallows the mouthful, grunting his approval.

"Ar tau patinka tai? Do you like it?"

"Yah!"

Hannibal feeds the baby all the cereal then goes to slice a ripe banana.

"Want to try feeding yourself?"

He places a few, small pieces of banana onto the tray. The baby enthusiastically attacks them with his fingers but has trouble bringing them up to his mouth. "Eh!" He screams, smashing them into submission before flinging them off the tray.

" Baik! Stop! Let's keep the food on the tray," Hannibal scolds, though he makes certain to keep his voice light. " How about some vanduo? Water?"

Hannibal hands the boy a small baby bottle filled with water then mashes the remainder of the banana in a bowl.

"Vincas!"

The boy looks over at him and Hannibal's heart swells; for unknown reasons, the child responds to the name.

"Vincas? Would you like some more bananas?"

"ana!"

"Good! Banana!"

Hannibal is nearly done feeding the bananas to the insatiable Vincas when his landline rings. He grabs the cordless phone and walks back into the kitchen. "Dr. Lecter speaking."

"Dr. Lecter? Hello! It's Mrs. Inez from CDSS. How is the baby?"

Hannibal hands Vincas the bottle of warmed formula while juggling the phone under his chin.

"He's doing well! He's up and finishing breakfast."

"Good! I'm just confirming my home visit for tomorrow morning at nine."

"Yes! You're on the calendar."

"Excellent! And I wanted to give you a quick update about Jonathan's case."

Hannibal's hands turn numb.

"Alright."

"His parents have not been located, but some of the people he was living have been traced out of state; incarcerated for outstanding warrants."

Vincas flings the half-empty bottle onto the floor and pulls at his bib.

"Eh! Eh!"

"Wait a moment...Papa is on the phone...they were not his parents?" Hannibal asks.

"No...from what we can piece together his aunt was caring for him. She claims the boy's mother, her sister, is deceased and that she never knew the identity of the father."

Hannibal tries to form words but find he can't.

Mrs. Inez continues.

"I can't discuss the charges, but the children have all been placed into protective custody."

"There were other children?"

"Two; a boy and a girl, but I'm told they're no relation to your baby John Doe."

"I see."

"But there is some positive news! It's still unverified, but we've been told that Johnathan's real name is William Graham."

"William Graham..." Hannibal repeats woodenly.

"Yes. His aunt thinks he was born in Oregon or Washington around ten months ago; but we're still trying to track down a birth certificate. So... you can began calling him by that name now; see how he responds."

"Yes... I will."

"Wonderful! I will see you both tomorrow Dr. Lecter!"

"Tomorrow at nine."

"That's right, see you then. Goodbye."

"Goodbye now."

Hannibal hang-up and stares at the baby who has found a remnant of banana and is busily smearing it into his hair. As if in a dream, Hannibal places the phone onto the kitchen island.

William... Vincentas, it is a remarkable coincidence.

"William!"

The baby does not look over; Hannibal frowns.

"William!"

Still nothing.

"Will!"

The boy's response is immediate. His head turns, his mouth drops open and his eyes go round in surprise.

Hannibal's face softens at the baby's reaction.

"Will." He murmurs, going over to stand at the highchair and stare down into the little face. "Vincas..." he repeats wonderingly.

The baby leans his head back returning the man's gaze and smiles.

Hannibal smiles back.

"Will it is," he says. "Let's get you cleaned-up and see if anyone wants to go to the zoo with us!"

By the time Will is washed, dressed, changed, and his diaper bag packed, he's ready for a nap. Miraculously, he doesn't protest when Hannibal places him into his crib; he merely flips onto his stomach, and begins sucking his thumb. Hannibal goes to call Francesca.

"Frannie? Can we meet later? He's just gone down for a nap."

"Sure! We're still on break so we're flexible. Want to meet inside the entrance around two?"

"Sounds good...do you eat there? Should I pack a picnic?"

"I'll have snacks, but the older boys always want fries so we usually stop at the restaurant...and just to warn you, we'll need to ride the train at least once, so bring some cash."

" French fries and a train? What sort of zoo is this?"

"The best sort! Weren't you at Stevie's party the time we had it there?! When he knocked-out two teeth on the playground then Eli had a meltdown about cotton candy?!"

Hannibal's happy smile fades a bit at the image of how such an innocent outing could go so horribly off the rails. "Oh dear...no, I don't remember anything as thrilling as all that...today should be fun though!"

"There won't be a dull moment, that's for sure! "

"I've lived in a Soviet-controlled country," the man boasts, "I think I can handle a trip to the zoo with little children!"

Francesca laughs at their friend's machismo.

"Alrighty! It's a 'go' then comrade! See you at two!"

Want to see a cute illustration of Will in his Doggie booties? Sure you do!!!! Vincas/Will and his Papa Hannibal

Chapter End Notes

Ah Hannibal- what could possibly go wrong?

Vote 1 for a crazy trip to the zoo.

Vote 2 for a sweet trip to the zoo.

Aš tave myliu... Ar myli mane?" I love you, do you love me?

Gal galeciau jums padeti?"- Can I help you?

"William is an Americanized version of the Lithuanian given name Vincas (pronounced VIN SUSS). For some reason most Lithuanians named Vincas/Vincentas (a form of Vincent) opted for William rather than Vincent once in America."- Source:Message board ancestory.com

He Called Me Daddy

Chapter Summary

Hannibal and Will prepare for a trip to the zoo.

Chapter Notes

This chapter is an homage to Mads and how he is with children, i.e. adorable!!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"Waaaaaaa!"

Hannibal is making a final diaper bag check when Will announces he's ready to be released from his crib.

Maybe this is why people have monitors. Hannibal enters the nursery. So *they can retrieve their little one before they get to the meltdown stage*. Hannibal lifts the boy and smashes his face into Will's warm belly while making duck noises." Qakkkkk...qakkkk! Who's ready to go to the zoo?" Will squeals and grabs fistfuls of Hannibal's hair. "Ow! Alright! Alright!" Hannibal slowly wiggles his head back and forth to dislodge the boy's fingers. "Let's get you changed and then we'll go!"

"Eh!"

Will is less than pleased at finding himself laid-out on the hated changing table. He bucks and squirms and manages to knock-off the whole stockpile of distraction toys.

"Uh oh." Wide, blue eyes search Hannibal's face for any sort of reaction. The man makes a duck face and quacks as he undresses the baby and preps a clean diaper.

"QAAAAK...QAAAK...QAAAKK...."

Hannibal's Donald Duck noises and odd facial expressions hold the boy's attention for a few precious moments but he soon remembers he's meant to be unhappy.

"EH!"

At that moment, Hannibal opens the diaper and discovers the most massive poop ever unearthed in the Western Hemisphere; Will's healthy appetite has come to fruition out his other end. The smell is so strong, Hannibal struggles not to dry heave. He reminds himself that he's a trained physician and breathes through his mouth, wiping away at the foul mound of goo. *How far up the back did this go?* The man lifts the screeching baby by his ankles to follow the trail of livid poop past the boy's tailbone. *Okay so this onesie's toast.* Hannibal undresses Will completely while debating whether to give him a quick bath. *No...we're already running late...he'll have one when we get back.* Hannibal snaps a clean onesie on and gathers-up the boy for a trip to the bathroom. *No wonder people with kids are frazzled.*

"Never thought I could accomplish so much one-handed!" Hannibal washes and dries his hands as Will dangles off his hip. The man frowns when he notices the time; they have five minutes until they are supposed to meet Francesca and the boys.

"We're going to be fashionably late, can't be helped!"

They return to the nursery as Will rubs his face against the man's sweater. *Add a clean sweater to the To Do list.*

"How about jeans and your little jacket with the ears? That's cute!"

"Eh!"

"Sounds like a plan!"

Hannibal pulls a shirt, jeans, socks, and a soft fleecy hoodie with cubby ears from Will's dresser. He ponders the collection of diminutive footwear ranged along the bookshelf. "Shoes! Do you really need them? You not really going to be walking anywhere, are you!?"

Will stares at the pile of clothes Hannibal has piled onto the dresser. "Eh!" He remarks and philosophically begins to suck his thumb.

"Exactly, " Hannibal smiles, " my thoughts exactly." He threads the baby's feet in through the top of the jeans and pulls them into place. They're a bit snug in the crotch due to Will's diaper but there's no time to switch them out.

"Here's your shirt!"

The baby yelps when his large, round head gets stuck half-way.

"Sorry, sorry," Hannibal soothes then chuckles at the expression of scorn in those blue eyes when they finally appear. "Papa forgot to un-button the back!" He velcros some warm booties onto Will's feet but barely has time to appreciate how cute Will looks because the baby is so grouchy and impatient. "Klock, klock." Hannibal clicks his tongue against the roof of his mouth, "Nearly done!" Hannibal's sound effects only seem to enrage the baby; he flails in the man's grip. "Boy! You are not even a tiny bit mellow, are you?"

Hannibal sprints through the house grabbing everything they'll need for their outing before changing into a clean sweater. In the kitchen he gives Will a rusk for each hand while he lugs everything out to the garage. Thankfully, the snack appeases the baby and he allows himself to be strapped into his car seat. Hannibal fits everything into the trunk and closes the lid triumphantly. He can't believe it, they're finally ready to go.

"There!" He smiles as he arranges a crib blanket over the baby's legs, " that wasn't so bad!?"

Will grunts softly as his face flushes red.

No.
No!
It can't be...

Will phlegmatically chews his Zwieback as the nauseating smell of poop floods the car's interior. Feeling every one of his fifty years, Hannibal un-straps the baby and lifts him into his arms before slamming the car door harder than strictly necessary. "Call Frannie," he orders his phone as he lets himself back into the house, not even bothering to slip off his shoes before entering.

"Hannibal? Are you here?" Francesca sounds like they're calling from the middle of a zombie apocalypse. "Hello?! Sorry I can't hear you!"

Hannibal teeters on the edge of sending his regrets but stops himself. *Lecter's aren't quitters!* "I'm here! Yes, sorry we're running late. Do you still want to meet?"

"Eli? What did I just say!? Sorry Hannibal. Yes! Just text when you get here and we'll arrange a place to meet. Stevie! Do not take that away from him! Hannibal? We've already seen everything near the entrance ...the boys are getting a little restless."

Hannibal can well imagine. "Right! Sounds good! See you then!"

"Bye now!"

"BYE UNCLE HANNIBAL!" Two voracious, young voices chime-in, immediately followed by the thin wail of a baby.

"Shhh! You woke-up the... " Francesca's call ends abruptly.

Hannibal looks down at the little boy eyeing the phone with interest. "Your auntie has their work cut out for them!" As he lays Will across the changing table he notices globs of gummy toast have worked their way into the fleece of the baby's once pristine hoodie. Hannibal sighs. "Oh well, close enough for government work...let's get your diaper changed."

"Yah! Yah! Yah!"

Will laughs at the man's surprised expression; he thinks Hannibal can be hilarious at times.

"Yeah?"

Will flashes his foster father a toothy grin of five seed pearl teeth. "Yah!" He yells, slamming down fists clutching disintegrating toast. " Yah! Yah! Yah!"

Remembering how the baby reacted before, Hannibal breaks out into song:

"She loves you, yeah, yeah, yeah
She loves you, yeah, yeah, yeah!"

At the first stanza, Will's eyes go wide. When he hears the familiar word repeated over and over again he is so tickled he doesn't even mind being stripped out of his jeans and dirty diaper.

"That's right, sing with me!" Hannibal wipes away the latest Will-creation.

"And with a love like that
You know you should be glad!"

Hannibal eases the new diaper under Will's clean bottom and belts out the chorus:

"She loves you, yeah, yeah, yeah!"

"Yah! Yah! Yah!" The baby yells enthusiastically, out of synch and out of key, but filled with joy from his new accomplishment. Hannibal laughs appreciatively and pulls Will upright to redress him in his jeans.

"With a love like that
you know you should be glad!"

"Yah! Yah!" The baby warbles laughing and kicking his legs as Hannibal carries him back out to the garage and locks the door behind them.

"With a love like that
You know you should be glaaaaaad!"

Hannibal bellows flamboyantly, shaking his rear to make Will laugh. He straps the child back into his car seat, drapes the blanket over him and kisses his gooey cheek. "Our first outing, little man! Let's go to the zoo!" Hannibal climbs into the driver's seat and presses the garage door opener.

"Yah! Mah!"

"More? More singing?"

"Yah!"

"A music lover!? Hold on...let me see what I can find. " Hannibal tries several Pandora channels until he settles on one Will seems to like.

"Shake, shake, shake, Senora, shake your body line
Shake, shake, shake, Senora, shake it all the time."

"Aaaaaa! Aaaaa!" Will vocalizes.

They quickly hit traffic. A vision of a pleasant fifteen minute drive dwindles away as they inch their way along and the baby loses interest in the music. "Eh! Eh! Eh!" Hannibal can't see Will's face, but his tone doesn't sound promising.

"'Almost there buddy! Hang on!"

"Waaaaaaaaa!"

Hannibal grits his teeth and stares helplessly at the parking lot of cars before them. The baby's cries grow louder and louder until Hannibal feels compelled to close the windows. No soft words, songs, sound effects, or stirring quotations dredged-up from days past help soothe the hysterical boy. Finally, traffic begins to move and the baby's cries stop.

"Will?" Hannibal calls quietly. He has no idea if the child has fallen asleep, choked on his toast, or is lulled by the car's movement. Just as he's debating whether to pull over to check, he hits a red light and comes to a sudden stop.

"Waaaaaaaaa!"

Well at least he's alive! When did I become one of those Helicopter Parent's? Hannibal stares into the middle distance until the light turns. "Okay! Here we go!"

"Waaaaaa!"

When they arrive at the zoo Hannibal finds he has to circle the lot several times before a spot opens up; Will's crying jag continues unabated. When Hannibal finally parks, he's so relieved he bolts out of the car, runs to Will's door, and yanks it open. The baby stops mid-cry, blinking in surprise at Hannibal's sudden appearance. And though Will's flushed, tear streaked face and matted eyelashes are proof of his distress, he smiles charmingly and wriggles with happiness.

"You're alright...you're alright, " Hannibal lifts the baby's car seat out. He soon has the stroller set-up and places the seat into it with a satisfying 'click.' *Well done!* Hannibal takes a moment to just breathe and compose himself. "Okay! We can do this! Stroller, diaper bag, extra jacket, wallet, phone, keys," he recites while adjusting Will's blanket. Thankfully the child is too interested in his surroundings to fuss which allows Hannibal ample time to load-up the stroller's storage compartment and button-up his own coat. "Let's go see the zoo animals!" The man locks the car then pushes the stroller along the pathway, nodding at the smiles of friendly strangers; the epitome of a well-dressed, zen, modern parent. *Ha! If they only knew!*

"Is it a boy or a girl?"
"How old is he?"

"Did you havta to pay for him?"
"Do you get to keep him?"
"Why is he almost bald?"

Hannibal tries and fails to answer the barrage of questions when he greets Francesca's brood outside the snack bar.

"Does he eat French fries?" Steven wonders.

Secure in his stroller, Will stares at the boys eating their snack. Hannibal tries not to laugh; Will is tracking every French fry the older children are gobbling down. "Not yet, but soon."

"Is he white?" Seven year old Steven wants to know.

"He's Caucasian, yes."

"What does he eat?" Eli dunks a golden fry into a tiny cup of catsup.

Will smacks his lips.

"The same things you did when you were little," Francesca chimes in smiling at Hannibal. "How's it going comrade?" They smile a wide, bright smile to the baby in the stroller. " Hey there bubba! You giving your papa a hard time?"

"Can we go see the monkeys?"
"No! I wanna go on the playground!"

Francesca stands and adjusts Malcolm in his sling; the baby peers sleepily down at his big brothers before noticing Will and gracing him with a gummy smile. "Bathroom, apes, playground," they command. "Hannibal? Could you take them into the Men's room for me?"

"Of course," Hannibal says, eyeing Will, he wonders if the baby will cry when he leaves.

"Thanks! Eli, Stevie, go with Uncle Hannibal. Eli, make sure Stevie doesn't fall into the toilet; have him stand up if he doesn't want to use the urinal...hey little booger!" They say, pulling Will's stroller towards them. "Your daddy's going to go take the big kids to the bathroom... he'll be right back!" When Francesca notices Hannibal's hesitation, they tear their gaze off Will and smile encouragingly. "Boys?! Take Uncle Hannibal's hands and show him where the potty is." Hannibal's hands are immediately captured by two wiry little boys eager to get the bathroom out of the way so they can have some actual fun.

"Come on Uncle Hannibal!" Steven whines, pulling with all his might. "I wanna go to the playground!"

Francesca studies Will as he watches his foster father tugged toward the restrooms. The little boy twists in his seat until he can no longer see Hannibal. When he turns back, his bottom lip is pushed-out and trembling.

"Oh, oh! It's okay!" Francesca frees the baby from his car seat and sets him onto their lap. The babies are face to face now with Malcolm still snug in his sling. "Remember Malcolm? "

Will takes a shuddering breath and puts his thumb into his mouth. His eyes are filled with tears but he doesn't cry. He sits on Francesca's lap and sucks his thumb, staring at Malcolm who stares back.

"Okay! We're done!" The boys are back and anxious to be on their way.

"How was he?"

At the sound of Hannibal's voice, Will's head jerks up and he rips his thumb out of his mouth. "Dada!" The baby calls, holding up his arms and leaning towards the man. "Dada!" Hannibal scoops the child up and Will shoves his head under the man's chin while taking hold of Hannibal's lapels with his little fists. The man can feel the rapid beating of the boy's heart pressed against his chest. Overcome, Hannibal hides his face in the soft hoodie.

"Wow!" Francesca says quietly. They stand-up and lightly place one hand on Hannibal's back and the other onto Will's; they rest their head against the man's shoulder. "He called you daddy," they murmer wonderingly against the velvety wool of Hannibal's pea coat.

Hannibal has to swallow twice before he can trust his voice. "He called me daddy," he agrees shakily, placing a quick kiss to the top of Will's head as he cuddles the clinging baby. Hannibal looks down into Francesca's upturned face.

"He called me daddy."

Chapter End Notes

Songs:

"She Loves You"- The Beatles

"Jump in the Line"- Harry Belefonte

Pink Popcorn

Chapter Summary

Will and Hannibal's trip to the zoo ends abruptly

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will loved the little steam train ride from beginning to end, though he was less certain about posing for the souvenir photograph.

The photographer had placed the two babies between the older boys and as soon as he realized he would be separated from Hannibal, Will began to whine.

"Say 'stinky feet'!"

"Stinky feet!" Eli and Steven roar gleefully while Malcolm stares, opened mouth. Sensing an opening, Will pulls himself up and over the back of the railway carriage. The adults watch in horror, as though in slow motion, the baby's upper half teeters over the seatback.

"Grab him!"

Hannibal and Francesca simultaneously run towards the train, arms outstretched.

"Got 'em!" Eli yells proudly wresting the wailing baby back to safety.

"Got' em!" Steven echoes, putting an arm around Will's back and getting head butted for his trouble. The older boy's cherubic face registers shock before he lets loose a banshee cry. Frightened, Malcolm adds his cries to the melee while Hannibal and Francesa hurriedly gather-up their brood and attempt to bring order to chaos. Hannibal takes Will into his arms, pacing and jiggling for dear life, while Francesca soothes their crying children.

"You're such a baby!" Eli observes with seven year old scorn.

"Am NOT!"

" Who wants popcorn?" Francesca asks before things escalate any further.

"Meee!" Eli yells. "Pink popcorn!"

Steve shoots his brother a sour look." Me!" He growls sullenly.

"Eeee!" Will squeals, safe in Hannibal's embrace. "Peee peee!"

The older boys look at one another before dissolving into giggles; their feud already forgotten.

Francesca makes a face. "Shoot! I forgot about little booger! Malci doesn't mind not eating it, but your little one looks like he's not going to take 'no' for an answer."

"Pink popcorn! Pink popcorn!" The older boys chant, running towards the popcorn kiosk like orcas zeroing-in on a pod of dolphins. The adults grab their things to follow.

"Can we each get one?"

"Nope, one to share," Francesca replies predictably holding out a five, but pulls it away before Eli can snatch it."How many ones should you get back?"

"Two! "

"Good job!" Francesca hands the boy the bill. "Don't open the package until you get back!" They call after the excited boys.

"We knooooooow," they chime in unison.

Hannibal and Francesca collapse onto a nearby bench, their babies on their laps, and monitor the boys in line. Within minutes, Malcolm has nursed himself to sleep, but Will, over-tired and over-stimulated whines unhappily, rubbing his face against Hannibal's chest. All offers of a bottle, Cheerios, and blueberries are rejected; Will is clearly holding out for pink popcorn and pink popcorn alone. Hannibal checks the older boys' status; still only halfway through the long line. "Let's go for a little stroll," he is about to suggest, when he notices Will's attention is absorbed elsewhere.

A family has come to sit on the next bench over; mother, father, and two young children. Hannibal smiles, watching his baby track their actions like a hawk. The boy is sloppily eating from a box of popcorn while his younger sister munches a churro. Hannibal studies Will. The baby's rosebud mouth quivers involuntarily, as though he's savoring bites of phantom food.

"Mooom! That baby is staring at me!"

"Aww! How cute! He likes you!"

Hannibal self-consciously turns Will to face the other direction, but the baby is having none of it. He twists and squirms until he is back in his previous position then nearly dives out of Hannibal's lap when the half-filled popcorn box falls to the ground. Hannibal leaps to his feet and strolls over to the boys in line.

"Hi Will!" Stevie smiles at the baby who glares down at him before burying his head in Hannibal's neck.

"Don't mind him, he's a little cranky."

"Mmmmm," the baby grumbles, alternatively chewing his fingers and sucking his thumb as Hannibal walks him around, pointing out tiny sparrows collecting bits of popcorn, pretzels,

and Goldfish dropped by visitors.

"Look! See the birdies?"

"Eh, eh, eh!" The baby replies, shaking his head quickly back and forth.

Hannibal suppresses a sigh and rubs the boy's back as he consults his watch; they've been here nearly two hours, but it feels like ten. *Time to go home.*

They return to Francesca who is gently swaying as they pat their sleeping baby. "You might not want to be here when they get back."

"No...I think it's important that children learn that they can't always get what they want."

Francesca snorts and looks meaningfully at the child in Hannibal's arms. Will's bottom lip is pushed out and he's squirming to be released, bent on investigating the nearby bounty of spilled popcorn. "Okay Mick Jaeger...but don't say I didn't warn you."

Where the hell are we?!

Hannibal is practically jogging as he pushes Will's stroller down the crowded pathway, searching for an exit. *Another dead end?! Damn!*

Strapped in his stroller, Will is giving new meaning to the term meltdown.

Okay...turn here...shit! This place is set-up like a casino!

"Almost there sweetheart!" He calls in a sing song voice, more for the benefit of the families they're whipping past than for Will; Will is far beyond the reach of comfort or reason by this time.

So this is what a panic attack feels like...good to know!

"Leaving?" A uniformed worker calls as they whirl past.

"Trying!" Hannibal stops, and laughs mirthlessly, he knows he must look psychotic.

The woman grins." Keep on this path, turn left...when you see the flamingos keep right and you'll see the exit."

"Thank you!"

Hannibal thinks he hears a faint "you're welcome" but he can't waste time with niceties; Will is apoplectic.

"Almost there, almost there!" Hannibal self soothes, trying not to mow down distracted toddlers who stray across his path. "Sorry! Excuse me! Sorry!" He knows families are

shooting him dirty looks, but right now, his whole focus is on the red-faced baby in his stroller. *Pink popcorn! The devil's instrument*!

Will gasps, and chocks as he screams, his little vocal chords sore and swollen from so much crying. Hannibal pauses briefly to un-strap the baby and pull him into his arms; it's a bit tricky to cradle Will while pushing the stroller, but he can't bear the thought of not trying everything to soothe the child.

"Hold on sweetheart...almost there..." Hannibal realizes he's been speaking in Lithuanian and forces himself to switch to English. "Such a good boy! Sweet baby! Let's get you home!" *Where the fuck are those flamingos!*

Hannibal turns a corner and could sob with relief, he's never seen a more beautiful sign in his life.

EXIT

He sprints over, rudely pushing past a line of people exiting through the turnstile and rams the stroller through the handicap gate. "Pardon me!" He yelps, hoping no patients or colleagues are here to witness this debacle.

Hannibal reaches his car and opens the back passenger door, but Will resists being placed into his car seat, he grips Hannibal like a baby sloth.

"Okay, okay little one, " the man murmurs, hoping Will will calm down in the confines of the car. "Papa will hold you... I'm not going anywhere."

Taking the insulated bag with him, Hannibal settles onto the backseat with Will on his lap.

As Will's cries quiet, Hannibal is shocked at how swollen the baby's eyes and face are. *Could he have been stung by a bee?* Hannibal kisses the top of Will's sweat drenched head while he looks for any signs of a insect bite. *None...just a temper tantrum. Just...Ha! What a joke!*

Will's damp hair stands-up in tiny spikes and tight, wooly curls; it tickles Hannibal's lips as they caressingly touch the baby's head. "Oh....baby boy...it's alright...it's alright."

Clasping the child to his chest, Hannibal pulls the top off the lukewarm bottle and shakes it, before gently pulling Will down and into the crook of his arm. "How about some milk? Hmm?" The man waggles the bottle enticingly.

Will whines and shakes his head, but his movements are sluggish and he isn't resisting his supine position. He looks up into Hannibal's face, his eyes squinty with displeasure but he's whining rather than screeching. *Progress!*

"Yes, yes, yes...that's better...it's alright, " Hannibal strokes Will's damp hair and presses kiss after kiss to the baby's hot, wet cheeks. Will stares into Hannibal's face for a moment before opening his rosy mouth. "Mak!"

Hannibal's smile broadens as he brings the nipple to the boy's lips, feeling a tug when Will latches on. "That's right...have a drink...papa will hold you, he's not going anywhere."

Will stares into Hannibal's eyes as he drinks and finally, the little body begins to relax.

The car is quiet now except for the steady sound of the baby sucking and his labored breathing. Every so often, Will pops his milky lips off the nipple to breathe through his mouth.

"Poor little stuffed-up nose," Hannibal coos. "You'll have a nice bath when he get home, and then we'll phone auntie...I'm sure they're worried about you, even though they'll probably tell your papa 'I told you so.'"

Will blinks and then slowly, cautiously, brings a small pink hand up to Hannibal's face.

Unaccountably, the man feels tears prick his eyes as the boy lightly touches first his cheek, then his chin, then the tip of his nose. When Will touches his lips, Hannibal kisses the diminutive fingers. Will's smile curls briefly around the nipple before he resumes suckling while exploring his foster father's face. It's an intimate experience, feeling the feather-light touches of a baby's hand, knowing that they've placing their trust in you.

"Who could ever give you up sweetheart? I know I never could. I want to be your papa for the rest of my life."

Will smiles again, as though he understands every word Hannibal is saying and the man feels his heart clench. *If he's not placed with me permanently what is going to happen to him...to me?*

The baby's hand drops away; the bottle is nearly empty, and his eyes are heavy. Hannibal pulls Will into his arms and goes around the other side to place him into his car seat. Will awakens and whines, already missing the warmth of the man's embrace but soon settles when a fleecy blanket is tucked around him. Hannibal kisses the baby's cheek one last time, and quietly shuts the door.

Will is still out cold when they return home so Hannibal carries the car seat into the nursey. *Five o'clock. Nearly time to start dinner.* Hannibal closes the nursery door. *He can nap like this for now.* The man goes into the kitchen. *What was I thinking?! Going on this outing the day before our first in-home visit?*

Luckily there is still plenty of food left from his friends' visit so Hannibal, still in his shoes and overcoat, stands in front of the open frig and grazes. *If he has a bad night tonight...no...don't think like that! Think positive!*

Hannibal wanders over to the living room and flops onto the couch, too tired to even move. Listlessly, he rolls his head and looks around the room. *Pretty clean, but I need to do some laundry before...before...*

Hannibal is asleep before he can even finish the thought.

A thousand miles away a young woman is calling her sister's cell; a strange man answers.

"Is Lacey there?"

"Sorry, you got the wrong number."

"You don't know Lacey? Lacey Graham?"

"Never heard of her, sorry," the man replies and hangs-up.

Discouraged, the woman shivers in the damp night air and gazes up into the sky; a full moon's round face peers out through a wispy bank of clouds.

Rumpelstiltskin moon... that's what Lace always called a moon like that.

The woman pulls hard on her glowing cigarette, a chill darting down her spine. She tries not to think about how a drink would help take the edge off. *Jesus, she was always such a bitch to me...telling me Rumpelstiltskin would hunt little girls on nights like this...was probably outside our window this very minute licking his fangs.*

The woman shivers again and tosses her half-smoked cigarette onto the gravel. Rubbing her gooseflesh, she walks back into the comforting warmth and bustle of the cafe. *That was just a story...I'm not that helpless little girl anymore. One day at a time...like it says in the Big Book.*

"Any luck?"

"No...but it's probably an old number. Shit! Now I'm gonna have to call my mom."

The other waitress grimaces sympathetically. "Gotta do what you gotta do to see your baby boy!"

"Yeah," the young woman's raises stormy eyes, whose blues and grays kaleidoscope with her thoughts. "I need to see my baby...haven't seen him in...well it's been a long time." She's ashamed to admit to the other woman she's not certain how long it's been.

"I'm sure you will! Oh, honey? Can you grab table three? I gotta go start another pot of decaf. "

"Sure," the young woman smiles; keeping busy is good. Keeping busy pushes the hurt away just that little bit longer; long enough to hopefully keep the inner voices and a drink at bay.

That night, one thousand miles away, a baby opens the stormy blue eyes he's inherited from his mother, turns his head on soft jersey sheets, sighs, and falls back asleep, instinctively knowing he is finally in a place where it is safe for him to do so.

Chapter End Notes

Anyone have a suggestion for Will's mom's name? I have no clue and I don't want to do a "Rebecca" where she is just called " the girl."

End Notes

I've added a few years to Hannibal's (Mads) age to make the math work-out.

kalakutpisa- turkey fucker (http://www.ltuworld.com/homes/item/292-curse-words)

Hannibal as a Young Pioneer is based on tumblr bansheegrahamtao's drawing of him as a boy .

All Lithuanian is vetted by the wonderful, delightful ann on AO3- a million thanks to you!!

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!